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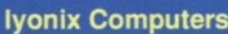
SPAM
Cleaning up your e-mails before you see them

AND MUCH MORE BESIDES...

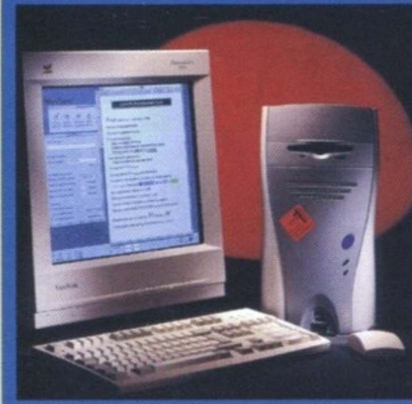


ISSUE 259 MAY 2003 £4.20

Liquid Silicon



• Computers & Music Hardware • Upgrades • Software • Cables etc •







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RiscStation second serial port	£10.95
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Ovation Pro	£138.95
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R-Comp Internet Suite	£73.95
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Note from the Editor

First I would like to apologise for the lateness of the last issue of Acorn User. It was a conspiracy, at least it felt like a conspiracy, of circumstances. Hopefully this one will be on time or, at least, closer to the correct time bearing in mind we are going to press over Easter.

But this time we are looking ahead again, there are opportunities and new products which make the whole RISC OS market much more exciting.

In the news you will find a feature on a whole new killer app developed by someone who's been in and around the RISC OS market for a long time, City Audio Services. Julian Coleman is the man in charge and he has created an application that fills an important need for tens of thousands of companies across the UK, and the World. Lots of opportunity there.

Funnily enough, speaking of killer apps, we received an e-mail in early April from a US company who have an Archimedes computer doing an extremely important job for them. They feel they need to replace it, not because it has failed, but because it has effectively out-lived the staff that know how to support it. And the company that wrote the program in the first place.

We are, of course, in discussion with them to encourage them not to change but instead we will be seeking someone who will be able to help them support the existing software and perhaps enhance it with a new machine and a re-write.

We have the Wakefield Show, of course, a very exciting new event where we are expecting to find Omegas being distributed. Well, the omens are good at last, and the entrails of the last PC we sacrificed indicated good things to come.

Then there is Oregano 2. We are reviewing that in this issue as well, definitely rather closer to the cutting edge of Web technology if not actually leaning over the edge and looking at the view.

On the USB front we have Stuart Tyrrell's USB MP3 player; Plus we are looking at anti-spam in the form of the R-Comp/Stuart Halliday collaboration Feathermail. This is a way to wash out all the nasty spam stains from your e-mail leaving it whiter than white.

So there is a huge amount going on in our RISC OS market, many things that keep our market cooking with natural gas and have the opportunity to bring more life and more people back into our world.

Enjoy.
Rob Donaldson

Wireless Networking

A Range of Wireless networking devices allowing RISC OS and PC machines to be networked without having to lay cables etc. All products comply with IEEE802.11b and interwork with other compliant systems.

Wireless USB adaptor: plugs into RISC OS machines fitted with Simtec USB card. Stack based on acclaimed NET100 code.

Wireless USB adaptor: £79.95. PC version (no RISC OS drivers) £69.95

Wireless Access Point / Bridge / Media Converter: This versatile device allows single machine or groups of machines fitted with network cards to be integrated into a wireless network.

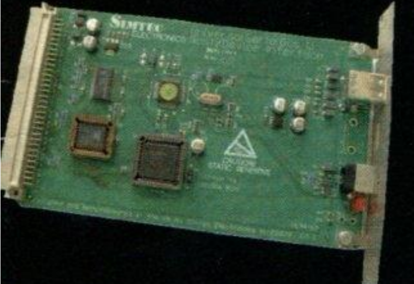
Wireless Access Point / Bridge / Media Converter £99.95inc

Wireless PCMCIA Card: For use with Portable machines: £59.95inc

Wireless Broadband Router: Please ask for details

cordless (pictured) £29.95. PS2MouseMini interface required. Laser trackballs are should be taken not to look into the laser beam. Please observe warning labels etc.

In association with: www. **RISCOS-USB**.com



Simtec USB card

Provides USB expansion to RISC OS machines

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Email: info@stdevel.co.uk
http://www.stdevel.co.uk
All prices include VAT and P&P
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Artworks 2 nears completion

MW Software are well on the way to having a full 32-bit version of Artworks running and available for existing users to upgrade at the Wakefield Show on May 10th.

At the time of writing, the first 32-bit beta version had just been sent out to testers, with the majority of the conversion work completed and Artworks 2 running natively on the Iyonix PC for the first time.

Artworks 2 will also see a raft of new features and enhancements, although all may not make it into the initial release which will mainly just add 32-bit support for RISC OS 5. Features such as improved Draw file import, new path tool, and new Polygon plug-in are just some of the planned improvements in the initial release, with more following over time.

MW Software have released some initial benchmarks of Artworks 2 running on an Iyonix PC which compare a "real world" like-for-like task of plotting the well known "raindrop" illustration (which was the front cover of the June 2002 issue of Acorn Publisher) in 32 million colours which Artworks 2 renders more than five times faster on the Iyonix than on a StrongARM Risc PC equipped with a ViewFinder card.

The illustration requires more than 80,000 shapes to be rendered and makes heavy use of Crystal's transparency options. It is undoubtedly one of the most complex ArtWorks illustrations ever created and a good benchmark file to test the speed of Iyonix PC.

www.mw-software.com

RISC OS calling

OK not quite, but if you have frequently used one of those automated telephone menu systems it is quite possible that soon it will be a RISC OS machine you will be listening too.

City Audio Services have released "Virtual Call Centre" software which has been developed as a response to the hitherto unfulfilled need to provide access to very substantial quantities of audio information at reasonable cost, via telephone. A major factor in the development of Vcc was the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act which states "visually impaired users may access information at a time to suit them in a way that is always available and which may be (with 0800 numbers) entirely free"

Vcc provides call centre type information without any people, thus enabling the provision of services which would simply not be economically viable through manned operations.

The Vcc is fully configurable by the site "manager". It includes a set of default navigation audio files which instruct the caller what to do next. It is up to the site manager to define and provide audio files for site specific functions.

Audio files, and indeed the whole site, may be configured to use alternate voices for all functions. Thus the whole system may switch to another voice, accent or language at any point. For example, if providing information in different languages, the first menu might say:

For English press 1

Pour ecouter en Francais, choisisez deux

etc

From each selection point, the system language may then be configured to suit.

The audio output options are many and varied to cope with different potential requirements:

• Playback of a sequence of predetermined audio files.

• Playback of a "variable" message, the software will pick up a 'live' message from another application. For example the suite includes a voice clock, which enables the Vcc to announce the time and or date at any point. Other such inputs may be programmed as required.

• Playback of script files. This facility has several variations on a theme but at its root allows the system to access a text file provided either by the site manager or from another program, including any computer linked via a network.

• Playback of long sequences of files (for example, the book lists) where the caller can jump to the previous file, the start of same file, the next file or the end of the file list by using keys. Supports MPEG or any native RISC OS format.

• Playback of very long files. In theory any length file may be played back, with keys to jump backwards and forwards through the file. Supports MPEG or any native RISC OS format.

• Questionnaire files: a list of questions may be played, each requiring an answer which may be a single keypress (for example, a numerical value) or a recorded answer. All answers are logged for later analysis. This facility also allows the implementation of an order system, one question asking for all order details and so on.

• The system may be switched to 'remote control' such that at relevant points, control of the Vcc is handed over to bespoke external software. This allows the system to be used for complex, and client specific, applications which cannot be included in the core code.

Currently this software must be written for the host platform (which supports many common computer languages), however it is envisaged that in due course an interface to this facility will be provided to any type of computer, connected via the network.

The first major implementation of this system has already gone live by a company called "Best Audio Books" who offer audio versions of popular printed material for the visually impaired, and for whom an audio-based ordering system is invaluable for their target customers.

City Audio Services
cas@argonet.co.uk
Mob: 07714 125311

Aemulor released

After a few months delay, the full version of the 26-bit emulator for Iyonix PC "Aemulor" is now available at £50 + VAT from your local RISC OS dealer or direct from **www.aemulor.com**

The Aemulor team have incorporated many of the improvements suggested by users of the free demo version released last month, and have also made some further XScale optimisations to further increase the speed of emulation.

A list of applications which are known to run successfully under Aemulor on Iyonix now include:

Artworks, Datapower, Drawplus, Eureka, FontFX, HTMLEdit, Impression Publisher, Impression Style, Poster, Powerbase, ProArtisan, ProCAD, Resultz, RiscPCB, RiScript, Schema2, Squirrel, SSS, StrongED, Studio24 Pro, TemplEd, and Vector.

A more extensive list of applications is available on the Aemulor Web site.

Work is now commencing on Aemulor Pro, which will add support for the 4, 8 and 16 colour screen modes which are not currently

available on Iyonix PC. This will allow software such as Sibelius which requires those low colour modes to be run. The Aemulor team are also working on a "secret" enhancement which they say may be made available to all RISC OS users (ie not just Iyonix) in the near future ‹ watch this space.

Aemulor have also released details of a new licensing scheme aimed at software publishers who do not have the resources or have lost contact with the original software authors thus preventing them from performing 32-bit conversions of their software. The scheme allows a software publisher to "bundle" Aemulor with their application for a reduced price if the user does not already own a copy.

www.aemulor.com

Photos on the Web

The popular Webgen application that will take a directory of images (IF, JPEG, TIFF, PNG, SPRITE and PNG) and turn them into a complete Web site has just been upgrade to version 2.

This release expands on the options Webgen offers, making the generated site much more flexible, both in the generation process, and the usability of the resulting Web pages.

All the code generated is as close as possible to the W3C's html standards, and should validate to 4.01 transitional.

Webgen2 has a large number of improvements and additions to the original Webgen:

• The thumbnail page can be split up into smaller pages
• A site description can now be automatically added, which can then be formatted within Webgen2
• A banner image can be added at the top of the index page
• The use of tables to line up thumbnails has been improved considerably
• It is now possible to include the name of the image below each thumbnail
• The inter-site navigation options have been improved slightly
• It is now possible to add a mailto: link at the bottom of the index page
• Previous/Home and Next tags can be edited
• It is possible to set colours, background image and fonts
• Meta information can be added
• All the style information can be extracted out into a stylesheet
• If CSS is used, code will validate to html 4.01 strict
• Nested image directories can be searched or ignored

To get the latest copy, please go to www.argonet.co.uk/users/daves/software If you have the current !Webgen, just load it to the iconbar and click on the 'Web' icon on the info window. Webgen2 is not an update for Webgen, it is a complete replacement.

89 is the number

Stuart Tyrrell Developments have reduced the prices of their Simtec USB cards from to £69.95 + Carriage + VAT = £89 inclusive.

To reflect this change, a number of other products which bundle the USB podule card have also been reduced in price.

Simtec's USB podule enables the addition of USB peripherals to RISC OS machines, including the Risc PC, A7000 and A5000 series machines.

STD also offer a number of other USB products which are bundled with RISC OS drivers including:

USB Keyboards and mice
USB Hubs
Epson 1660 Photo Scanner
USB Wireless LAN devices (as previously reported in Acorn User)

ÉAnd a new device for music lovers : an USB hardware MP3 player. The device combines the convenience of plug-and-play FLASH storage with an on-board MP3 decoder to provide a convenient mobile music solution.

The player is fully supported by the Simtec USB podule, and contains 64MB of flash memory. A full filing system is supplied and the device can be used for storage of any kind of file, not just MP3, allowing transfer of files over to a PC or to other machine equipped with the Simtec USB podule. Any MP3 files stored upon the device may also be played using the supplied headphones. A simple intuitive wheel control is provided for play/pause/power/track forward/back and volume.

Total dimensions are just 9cm x 3cm x 2.5cm. Power is supplied by an internal Lithium-Ion battery which simply recharges when the player is plugged into the USB port.

A pack comprising the player, headphones and neck loop, RISC OS and PC software is available for £79.95 inc VAT and delivery. STD also have a wide range of devices due for release over forthcoming weeks.

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Fax: 0870 164 1604

New RISC OS book

The first in a new series of RISC OS books is a re-launch of Martyn Fox's excellent "First Steps in Programming Acorn RISC OS computers". This first book focuses on providing a clear introduction to many aspects of RISC OS programming. There is a sequel focusing on WIMP programming; and as such this book avoids the subject entirely.

This book is different from others to be released in this series as it will be on a not-for-profit basis only; with at least £4.99 from every book going to the Cats Protection League.

The book, including supporting disc, is to be priced at £12.99; postage is an extra £2.00 although copies will be available at Wakefield Show if you wish to save on the postage fee.

This title will be on a strict print run, as such, if you'd like one please e-mail the publisher at david@alligatagroup.co.uk to confirm your interest

User group meetings

BAUG: The oldest established Acorn/RISC OS Group, now in their 21st year

May 13th: Risc PC Problem solving evening with the Brains Trust. No meeting on May 27th.

RISCOS.be meetings at the 9 and 23 May. More info at www.riscos.be

The RISC OS User Group of London meets at 7:15pm on the third Monday of each month in the upstairs room of The Blue-Eyed Maid, 173 Borough High Street, London SE1 1HR. The May meeting will see a demonstration and discussion of DataPower 2 (RISC OS database software), and the June meeting is a hands-on RISC OS/Windows networking evening. Admittance and membership are free. For more information, e-mail info@rougol.jellybaby.net or phone 07876 035 495.

The ICENI Computer Club meets at the Bourne Vale Social Club, Halifax Road, Ipswich IP2 8RE at 19:30 on the first Wednesday of each month. The June meeting will be a review of what printers members are using with their RISC OS computers, and what success they're having (with demonstrations), and the July meeting will focus on burning CDs. Admittance to your first meeting is free. For more information, e-mail peter.l.dunn@btinternet.com or phone 01473 728 881.

The RISC OS North West User Group continues to meet at the Trafford Metrovick Rugby & Cricket Club, Finnybank Rd, Sale, Cheshire M33 6LR on the third Wednesday evening of each month. Admittance and membership are free. For more information, email info@ronwug.org or phone 0161 969 9820.

ARM outlook "flat"

Releasing their Q1 results, ARM said that sales and profits in its first quarter to March 31, this year, declined from the same quarter a year before and in uncertain political and economic times the company sees no improvement ahead.

However, the company still managed to turn in a net profit, and one slightly increased on the previous quarter, even though sales revenue was down for the second quarter running at £31.0 million compared with £32.3 million in the previous quarter and £42.1 million in the same period last year.

The company's net profit in 1Q 2003 was £4.3 million compared with £3.6 million in the fourth quarter of 2002 and with £10.7 million in the first quarter of 2002.

The company signed eight new licenses during the quarter but managed to raise royalty revenues by a third sequentially. They reached about $16.2 million on 178 million units shipped. Five customers started shipping during the period, bringing the total number to 48 out of 112, the company said. As a result the balance between initial licence fees and royalty revenues in ARMs business is swinging towards royalties at present.

Sir Robin Saxby, ARM chairman, described the results as "robust" considering the uncertain political, economic and semiconductor industry environment surrounding ARM.

The company said it does not foresee any improvement in the circumstances that have given rise to slower licensing activity in the last three quarters. It said it expects total quarterly revenues will remain at a similar level as Q1 2003 in the short term.

Meanwhile, Pace Microtechnology, the holders of the RISC OS Intellectual Property were reported to have made another round of redundancies at their ex-Acorn Cambridge office amid tough times in the digital TV and set-top box arena.

There was also media speculation that Alan Sugar, Amstrad chairman was interested in purchasing Pace, although Sugar issued a statement denying that: "In view of recent media speculation and continuing persistent press enquiries, I would like to make it perfectly clear that I have no intention or desire at this time to acquire control of Pace. That is also the position with regard to Amstrad PLC."

Sugar said one of his private companies once owned Pace shares "but no longer does so". While the rumours of a full takeover have been quashed, Sugar did not tackle the subject of whether he had been buying Pace shares or not.

Web Browser turns 10

Mosaic, the first major Web browser, was officially released 10 years ago. It was posted free of charge to the Internet. In 1990 Tim Berners-Lee, a British researcher at the CERN physics lab in Geneva, had created a set of technical rules for what he hoped would become a universal Internet document center called the World Wide Web. It was getting some buzz in the research community as a way to digitally distribute papers, but the first browsers were text-based only and hard to use.

Marc Andreesen and fellow NCSA worker Eric Bina's program handled graphics and was easy to use. Mosaic was an instant success online. Within six months, more than a million people had downloaded it. Before Mosaic, there were only a few hundred Web sites. But when huge numbers of people were able to access colourful pages, there was incentive to create innovative sites. That provided Web surfers with more reason to stay online.

The browser transformed the Net from a relatively static environment, mostly transferring e-mails around academic and business sites to one of dynamic movement, with millions of sites and servers. Within a few months, Andreesen left to co-found Netscape, and when the company went public in 1995, Microsoft already had a competing browser. Microsoft turned the browser into a feature of the operating system and now has an estimated 95% market share. Browsers are fairly mature technology, and there's not much design innovation coming from Redmond these days.

Aside from its visual richness, the browser's attraction is the simplicity of hot links and a back button, technology that anyone can grasp within a few minutes. That simplicity generated a huge audience, which in turn was one of the drivers of the explosion of e-commerce.

Impression to Web

If you are using Impression and want to use it to create Web pages look no further than DDF2Html version 1.02 which is now available for download from
www.bigfoot.com/~chrisbazley/utilities.htm

DDF2Html is a utility for converting Impression documents into HTML files, enabling you to send them to your PC-owning friends without losing all the formatting. It produces very clean HTML (although badly nested styles will be translated into badly-nested HTML tags). Notable features are that it produces correct 'paragraphing' (<P> </P> tag pairs) and converts Publisher's auto-numbered lists into HTML lists, in addition to taking a good shot at converting all the default styles/effects and allowing you to define your own corresponding to specific HTML tags

Changes since version 1.00:

- support added for defining a <HR> style, enabling you to prepare Impression documents including horizontal rules using Impression's own ruleoff facilities
- when reprocessing existing HTML files (to strip out top-bit-set characters) the contents of the TITLE icon reflect the current value in the file, and any changes made to this field will be saved into the output
- the program now copes gracefully with CR-LF line endings
- the new download archive includes a blank Impression file containing predefined 'HTML styles' which can be used as a template for preparing your own documents with an eye to HTML conversion.

KinoAMP v0.26

The RISC OS MPEG movie player is ever-expanding in features. This release provides:

- Improved MPEG2 support.
- Fast forward and Rewind controls.
- A control panel with selectable skin, when multitasking.
- Initial values for Volume, Brightness etc. can be set and changes to settings whilst playing can be

saved.

Download your free copy from www.everett9981.freeserve.co.uk/pete.htm KinoAMP is a version of Kino using AMPlayer to play the soundtrack. It is based on Kino v0.3 from eQ R&D, and was produced to provide improved operation on StrongArm machines. This version is 26/32 bit neutral.

ARMalayser v0.44

The programmers' code analyser and 32-bit conversion assistant, ARMalayser, has reached version 0.44 which is now available from www.armclub.org.uk/free Main enhancements and fixes in this release include:

- Performance analysis accuracy improved by adding instruction issue latency, and accounting for blocking due to previous register result latencies.
- 32-bit Stub and veneer templates provided to aid conversion of 26-bit C applications and modules.
- Control terminated strings recognised in error blocks and in various SWI parameters.
- SpriteArea display fixed and enhanced.
- Shared C Library subs _swi and _swix entry points correctly labelled.
- AIF header recognition tightened to prevent miss recognition.
- AOF code detection and file structure display enhanced.
- MSR immediate decoding and display fixed.
- Return address in R14 used when LDR PC dynamic branch encountered.
- NOP / Banked Register cautions not triggered on exclusive condition after MSR (used in some 26/32 bit neutral code sequences).
- Improvement of unpredictable caution display.
- ALIGN in assembler output replaced by DCB's of spare data to prevent differences of uninitialised data between builds.

Smart chip and pin

The long-awaited trial of chip and pin, the UK banking industry's multi-billion-pound anti-fraud initiative, is to begin next month. Chip and pin requires smartcard holders to authenticate purchases with a personal identification number rather than a signature. It will go on trial in Northampton.

During the trial, Northampton consumers will be prompted to use their pin for one in every two or three transactions using a range of debit and credit cards.

The UK chip and pin program will see more than 850,000 retailer terminals, 122 million cards and 40,000 cash machines upgraded by the end of 2004. A similar domestic pin-based system in France has reduced card fraud by 80% since its introduction 10 years ago. Most European countries, including France, are expected to implement the system over the next five years.

The chips on credit and debit cards will meet new global specifications known as EMV (Europay/ MasterCard and Visa). The EMV specification defines a broad set of requirements to ensure interoperability between chip cards and terminals on a global basis, regardless of the manufacturer, the financial institution, or where the card is used.

The EMV identification mechanism is not solely limited to online payments. It can also be used to identify the cardholder in any banking transaction, such as online-banking or online-brokerage. Once EMV cards are enabled for digital signatures, they can be used to digitally sign any kind of digital contracts, even legally binding contracts. In this context, it is possible to use chip cards for almost any kind of online transactions, such as logging into corporate systems

Intel backs wireless standard

A new wireless technology that could be used to deliver high-speed Internet access to homes and businesses within two years has received the backing of Intel and a handful of other technology companies.

The companies joined an industry group called WiMax to certify equipment based on the IEEE 802.16 wireless standard. The new IEEE standard could help to greatly expand the availability of high-speed Internet access. WiMax will ensure that equipment from different companies is interoperable.

The new standard is similar to Wi-Fi. But Wi-Fi users have to be closer than 300 feet to the base station antenna, and speeds top out at 55 MBps. With 802.16, users can be 31 miles away and speeds top out at 70 MBps. It is expected to have voice-quality sound and claims to have solved Wi-Fi's security problems. The U.S. Federal Communications Commission is expected to free additional spectrum to allow this technology to operate in an unlicensed portion of the radio spectrum.

One of the concerns with this technology is interference. It would seem that all the users across a congested metropolitan area network would quickly gobble up all the available bandwidth and suffer instantaneous gridlock. But radio has evolved from dumb receivers to intelligent devices. Thanks to increasingly powerful digital signal processing chips, such as those in cell phones, newer radios can detect and decipher increasingly feeble radio signals.

WiMax has the potential for being a last-mile solution, enabling homes to operate at superfast Internet speeds without dial-up, DSL, or cable connections. It has the potential to replace both the landline phone and the cell phone.

This technology is also a potential nightmare for companies like Vodafone, which has paid several billion pounds for "3G" mobile phone frequency spectrum, or for telcos like BT with untold billions tied up in copper-wire last-mile infrastructure. But there's more, as they say in the TV ads, the IEEE is working on 802.20 (Mobile-Fi) which promises links in cars and trains travelling at speeds that can exceed 120 miles an hour.

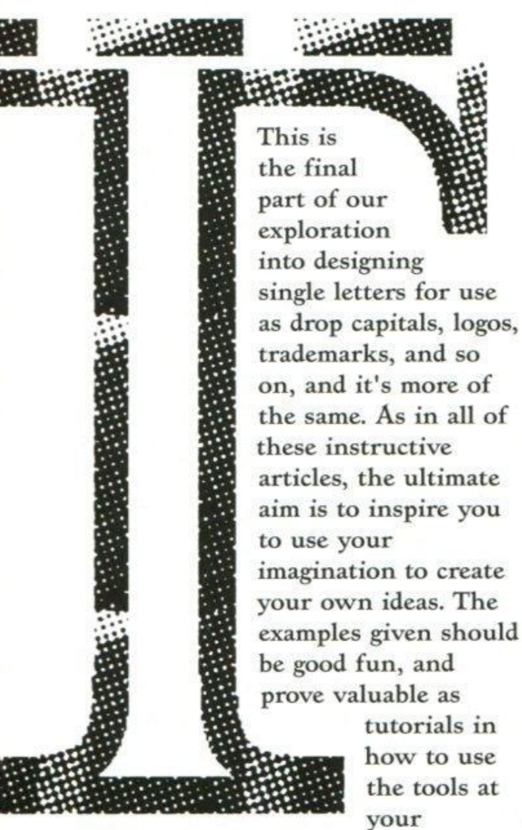
Fido.Net barks back

The newly revived ISP Fido.Net is offering an exclusive package which guarantees you will have the same e-mail for life. Not only do you get your own .uk domain, Fido.Net will keep your incoming e-mail scanned for PC viruses and spam. You get 10Mb of storage, 10 e-mail addresses, POP3, IMAPand WebMail access all for just £19.95 per year inc VAT.

The package has been designed for people who are using services like Hotmail, but getting thoroughly fed up with their lack of service, and especially now that more and more lists and companies are refusing to accept hotmail, netscape.net and similar addresses when taking sign-ups and orders online. For just £5 extra you can have a .com, .net or .org domain instead.

You can sign-up online at www.fido.net/email or by phone on 0800
1072 666

Quick recipes for single letters, pt 3



This is the final part of our exploration into designing single letters for use as drop capitals, logos, trademarks, and so on, and it's more of the same. As in all of these instructive articles, the ultimate aim is to inspire you to use your imagination to create your own ideas. The examples given should be good fun, and prove valuable as tutorials in how to use the tools at your disposal, and give you ideas for concocting your own unique and original designs.

Each example is treated in one or more of the following ways:

- Embellishing, where I have added a decorative device;
- Reversing out, where the letter is revealed against a stronger background;
- Manipulating, where I have altered the shape of the letter in one way or another;
- Enclosing, where the letter is enclosed within a rectangle, or other shape; and
- Objectifying, where the letterform is made up of other objects.

In all of these recipes, the letter should first be converted to a path, in Draw, Select Convert to path; in Artworks, Control + N.

R: Manipulated

I've opted to go for a fancy script-style R, which I filled with a colour of my choice, but with no line colour. Copy this and place it exactly over the first R, and give the new one a white line colour, with a good thickness (try 1pt, but it depends on the size of your original letter). Send this to the back (control-B) and copy it.

Place the new R over the other two and give it a line colour, in the example it's the same as the fill in the first letter. Now give a line thickness of twice the width of the second R (if it was 1pt, make this one 2pt, and so on). Send the third letter to the back, and there's your design.

S: Objectified

This one's a bit obvious, the S shape suggested a snake, so I drew a snake shape, gave it a face and a back pattern, and, well, that's it! If you can't draw, see if there's anything in your clip art collection which would do. You might have to adjust the drawing somewhat to fit.

T Enclosed

I've taken an everyday shape, a television, and drawn it freehand using the mouse. It doesn't have to be perfect, imagine your cutting it out of coloured paper. Sometimes the rougher it's drawn the better, because all you're doing is making the suggestion of a TV, and the essential elements are a box, a screen, a couple of controls. The T is placed in the middle of the screen and resized to fit. Colours? Go mad, see what you like best.

U: Manipulated

The letter U is a strong shape, and it can be suggested with very simple outlines. I've used a heavy sans serif font, Hull Black, and deleted the inside points so that all you're left with is a simple geometric shape. It can still be recognised as a U, however.

V: Reversed out/Manipulated

A geometric V has been chosen and rendered in white against a coloured background. Looking at the shape of the letter, I extended the "arms" on either side so that it exceeded the bounds of the background rectangle. This forces the viewer to notice the shapes surrounding the letter, shapes that are not normally considered.

W: Manipulated

Three W shapes are used in this design. The first is the straightforward letter. That is then copied and placed exactly on top of the first, and a few of the segments are deleted (in Draw, select the object with adjust, select a point and press Control + X). The resulting shape was then copied, placed on top and the same process repeated.

X: Objectified

A playful approach: letters, especially in serif fonts, often have "feet". I've taken this a step further by creating boots to go on the feet of the X.

Y: Embellished

The Y has been given a shadow effect by creating a small, long, thin triangle shape which is then copied several times, filled with white and placed over the right-hand sides of the letter.

Z: Reversed out

Like the U, the Z is a very strong, distinctive shape. I have merely suggested the Z by creating a simple rectangle and changing the end to echo the diagonal shape of the letter. This shape is copied and flipped over. They're both filled with white and placed within a circle.

There is no end to what you can with single letters when you get going. Hopefully the examples supplied will lead you towards your own recipes, and your own original creations.



Confessions of an ebay junkie

Recently I've been checking out the RISC OS part of ebay; "The World's Online Market Place". You may know that ebay is an Internet cybermarket where you bid against other surfers for the goods on offer.

I should explain what brought me here. My love affair with computing dates back to the early 80s when I was in my final year at University and the BBC Micro had just been launched. A mate bought one for £500. I could not understand why he had paid money for a thing that drew coloured concentric circles on a TV.

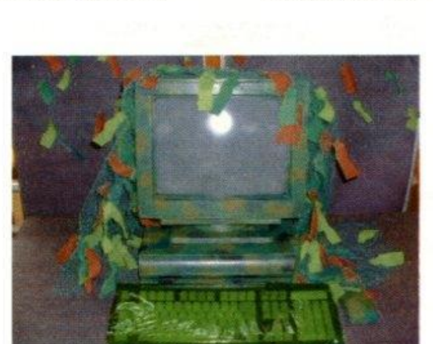
He went on to program it to control theatrical stage lighting and was snapped up by ITV when he graduated. By that time computing was the biggest thing around. I'd missed the boat, but I've since owned an Archimedes, an A5000 and, for the last two years, a Kinetic Risc PC. RISC OS is it, as far as I am concerned.

I typed "Acorn" on the ebay search engine, not expecting much. Immediately I was greeted with a list of working BBCs for £25, Acorn Electrons, (two for £10), and even a few Risc PCs, £30 asked. There were 144 items in all including lots of old software, in its original packaging, most of it going for a couple of quid or so.

Surprised by the interest in this old technology, I followed the bidding over a few days. A furious battle took an Atom past the £90 mark. A dead A4 rose to £67. A ROM of the game Snapper for an Electron hit £31. Hey! I had one of those ... did I want to buy or sell?

Registering as a bidder was easy and I joined in the trading with a rating of zero. It's very much like playing Elite. You begin as scum. Those you trade with also have a rating. This indicates how reliable they have been in the past. Some sellers with high ratings will not sell to scum. Previous time-wasters have a lot to answer for.

An art student had three glamourised Risc PC 600's for sale. One was painted in army camouflage, one as a Quality Street chocolate, and a third had painted white daisies all over it. I run a social club, I could cope with one of these sitting in a corner, so I bid £30. "Reserve not met, bid again" was the reply. I decided not to. A StrongArm for £51 looked better value. I placed a bid and was congratulated upon being the highest bidder. It was like taking candy from a baby.



An hour later, an e-mail informed me that another had out bid me for the StrongARM. The next day a string of apparently winning bids on £1 CD ROMs were trumped, literally at the last minute, just as I thought I'd finally bagged some bargains. Maybe this wasn't going to be so easy, or as cheap, as it had at first looked.

However, no one seemed to want to fight me over the first three Acorn User cover CDs for £1. A few days later, I secured a Risc PC 600 with 2MB of VRAM for £80. I gave up on the StrongARM as it went past £140.

I'd got what I wanted; a cheap but good RISC OS machine on which to set up a membership database for my social club. I bought a 128Mb SIMM for £55 from Castle Technology and a new 19inch monitor for £155, also from Castle, to make full use of the 2MB of VRAM. So for £300 I've got a set up that places the RISC OS banner in front of around two hundred Club members every week, as they sign in and out using their four digit membership numbers.

A few court cases and news items in the Press and TV have given ebay a reputation for dodgy dealings. When I told friends that I was buying stuff from ebay many viewed it as a place were stolen goods were traded or where people sent off money never to receive what they had payed for. In all, I purchased a dozen items, all without incident. I was careful to leave positive feedback about all of the people I purchased from as this is the mechanism by which time-wasters are rooted out of the system.

I enjoyed being involved in this lively RISC OS market place. There can be a real buzz in the closing stages of a deal as several surfers wade in with a little bit more. Often, it is better to let a determined bidder spend their money and leave the market. Another item, just the same, will be along in a day or two.

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Anti-spam brigade

Once upon a time there was a distinction between Unsolicited Commercial Email (UCE) which you received through your e-mail address; and "spam" which was delivered to newsgroups.

Spam is a lot easier to say than UCE; so UCE is old hat and every bit of junk e-mail you get down an electronic line is now spam. Even unsolicited faxes are often referred to as spam-fax, it wouldn't come as a huge surprise if physical junk mail eventually becomes spam (snail spam?).

Anyway whatever it is called, spam is a real problem in today's electronic mail and once you get your e-mail on to a spammers list you won't get it off again. Current estimates are that before very long the amount of spam on the Internet will exceed the amount of real e-mail.

The problem is very simple to explain: there are some very stupid people in the world. Some of these people are the ones who, in previous incarnations, would respond to small ads in Sunday newspapers promising them the ability to "attract girls instantly" just by sending £20 for a book (that probably told them to have a wash).

Nowadays this type of person still exists but they sit at the keyboard of a computer believing everything they are told. The reason that these people are the ones that cause the problem is this: They encourage the spammers by actually responding and paying them money for their dubious, if not non-existent wares.

Spam is cheap to send out (virtually nothing) and is sent to lists of millions of e-mail addresses on the basis that if you send out enough of this stuff somebody, somewhere is going to take you up on your offer and make it cost effective. And they do.

Sometimes there is a real product to be had (even if "real" means some disgusting porn site) but there are also the cheats. This works because, if there is "one born every minute" there are going to be a vast number of people who are going to believe the most unlikely things.

The most popular of these right now is the foreign, third world, government official who asks to borrow your bank account (or your business bank account) to transfer millions of dollars, for which you will receive a small percentage of the total. To carry this out all they need is your bank details. So you tell them and find your bank account cleaned out. Yes, some people are that stupid.

But where do these e-mail addresses come from? Web (and newsgroup) harvesting is the key. The people that create the e-mail lists have software that (a) scans the newsgroups and pick e-mail addresses from the newsgroup messages; (b) crawl all over the Web (like a search engine) and read HTML pages looking for e-mail addresses; (c) accessing mailing lists and seeing who's on them.

They compile these web addresses on to CDs and sell them to other people who use bulk e-mailing software to try to get through to your inbox and hence turn you into a potential client for their products.

Acorn User

Acorn User has had its own Web site for quite a few years now and in the days of innocence nearly 20 e-mail addresses were listed in plain HTML ripe for harvesting.

As a result, even though the addresses have been protected for a while, now Acorn User gets something like 200 to 300 spam e-mails per day. All these e-mails are fed through a set of Newsbase filters which does succeed in removing a lot of the rubbish, but not all.

Now this is an extreme case, but even on my personal account I had got up to about 40 spams per day, again heavily filtered but it was not good. This again was due to my personal Web site having actual e-mail addresses on it.

On the personal side we stopped it once and for all by changing our e-mail address and never letting it out on public release again. But sometimes mistakes can be made.

Recently there was a large company who had succeeded in protecting its staff from the ravages of spam for a long time. Then a PR company published the entire staff e-mail list on the Web in a completely unprotected way, they got harvested and that was the end of that period of calm.

I have mentioned filters and it is feasible to set up a lot of filtering in your own software, you can spend time analysing the spam you get and recognise patterns. For instance septic tanks are rather more common in the









USA than in the UK, so any e-mail with "septic" in the subject is very unlikely to be a real e-mail so you can just kill it.

Solution

But there are a lot of technical things about junk e-mails that I certainly don't know and, even if I did, it is unlikely that my software would be able to do anything about it.

Enter "Feathermail", this is a collaboration between R-Comp and Stuart Halliday (of Cybervillage fame). It is an e-mail system that stands between your usual e-mail server and you. It reads your e-mail, decides what is most likely to be spam and allows you to download what it considers is not spam.

Although I cannot be certain the claim of removing 90 per cent of all spam may be a little high, my guess for Acorn User is about 80 per cent, but as I've mentioned we have an unusual situation. And receiving 100 spam e-mails on Monday morning instead of 500 is a vast improvement.

Getting started

Registering with Feathermail is simply a matter of paying your money to R-Comp Interactive and telling them what User name and password you want on the Feathermail system.

A day or so later you will receive an eight page A5 instruction manual which tells you how to log on and set up the account. This is really easy. Once there you have to tell Feathermail where to collect the e-mail to be scanned. Strictly speaking this should only apply to a single e-mail address, but in a family you may collect mail from a number of different mailboxes so Feathermail lets you have up to five.

There are two ways Feathermail can collect your mail, one is to have it forwarded to the Feathermail server. But it will probably be easier to tell Feathermail your log-on details and let it collect your mail for you.

This is where a certain amount of trust is needed with this or any other mail cleaning service. You tell them your log-on details that means that they have access to all your e-mail and that you have to trust the company to keep your details secret.

That is why having a known RISC OS company providing the service, someone we have known for many years makes the trust part much easier. Given that you do trust them you tell them what they need to know.

The final step here is to say whether you want the final, cleaned, e-mails to be left at Feathermail to be picked up or forwarded to another e-mail address where you will pick it up. The only thing you must not do is forward it to the e-mail address it's just come from.

Once this has been done you adjust your e-mail software to pick up the mail from Feathermail or the other address. how you do this depends on the software you are using, as this service is being supplied by R-Comp there are instructions on how to alter Dial-Up and NetFetch. We use POPstar and that's just a matter of adding a line to the Users configuration file, and commenting-out the line that used to access our usual mailbox.

I suppose, at this point it is worth mentioning that the service is not just for RISC OS, it can be used with PCs, Macs or anything else you happen to have. The difference is that this is a service supplied by known RISC OS companies, not just some (probably legitimate) company off the Internet or a magazine.

Sorting mail

On the technical side, after you've collected your e-mail, you may have a problem. If you use multiple e-mail addresses or have a large number of users set up, you may have filters that split the incoming e-mails into various inboxes on your system.

Having gone through the Feathermail system this information may be lost. This is an expected problem and there is a solution. The mail that comes in from Feathermail has a new header added to it:

```
X-Feathermail-Original-To:  xxxx@xxxxxx.xxx
```

This gives you the original To of the original e-mail and you can use this to filter your incoming e-mails instead. I have done it and it works.

The only difficulty that I had with Feathermail was that my list of words to scan incoming subject lines was too big. After I had included all the defunct Acorn User usernames I couldn't include "prescription", "medication", "septic", "descrambler" and so on. I also felt the interface could be prettied up a bit but that was just personal preference.

As I mentioned at the beginning, it works and it works well. We, at Acorn User, are very happy indeed.

Steve Turnbull
steve@acornuser.com











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Italian spice

Good access to the Internet has been a problem for RISC OS users for a long time. Big companies create proprietory file formats and generate the PC (and Mac) methods to render them (whether visual or audio) but RISC OS is, unsurprisingly, omitted along with Linux.

It's up to the good old hackers to find out exactly what makes up a file format and then create a method of rendering it on RISC OS (sometimes porting the Linux version). The format changes and we are stuck again.

With the increasing dependence on the Internet for information exchange this lack of format provision is very damaging to the platform as a whole. We are forced to own PCs for yet another reason even though our computer of choice runs RISC OS.

When Oregano was launched by Castle Technology a long time ago it was up against Browse (Acorn) and Fresco (ANT). We all know what happened to Acorn and ANT decided not to support the RISC OS market any longer. Oregano continued to be sold and, at least, there was promise of support and enhancement.

And we did get it, although it has taken quite a long time to arrive. The newest version of Oregano 2 was seen on the Iyonix and it is now available for other RISC OS machines.

If you think you might like to have Oregano2 the first thing you need to do is download the demonstration copy from this Web site:

`www.castle.org.uk/oregano/o2demtc.htm`

There are a couple of other modules that you have to have, there's the 32-bit clean SharedCLibrary, the latest toolbox modules and the SSound module.

Having downloaded and tried it you then make your decision and contact Castle to buy it. You can do this as an update from Oregano 1 (for £49) or new (for £99 + VAT). You will be sent a card containing a unique PIN number, with this you register on the Web site and the upgrades needed to enhance the demo version up to the full version are downloaded. Reboot your computer and off you go.

The new icons for Oregano 2 are very swish, foregoing the obligatory "world" contained in most other Web browser icons. In fact the whole user interface for the Web page has been re-vamped and looks good. You can have alternate skins, support for this is now built-in properly as with most modern applications. One alternative is provided as standard.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating so I looked at the list of upgrades and identified the ones that held the most significance. These I decided to try out and see what would happen. I have also tried them on the old Oregano to see what the overall result is.

Enhancements

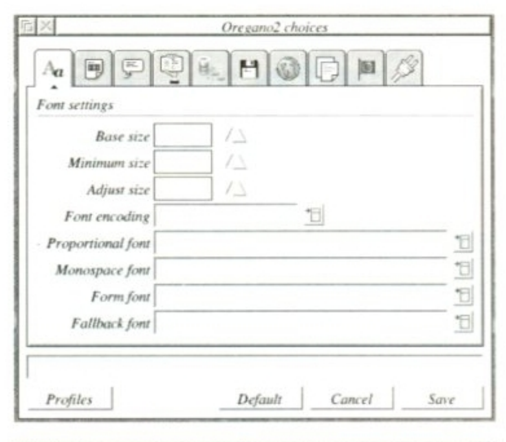
A huge number of fonts are now potentially handleable by Oregano but more important than that is that it is capable of rendering Far Eastern languages properly.

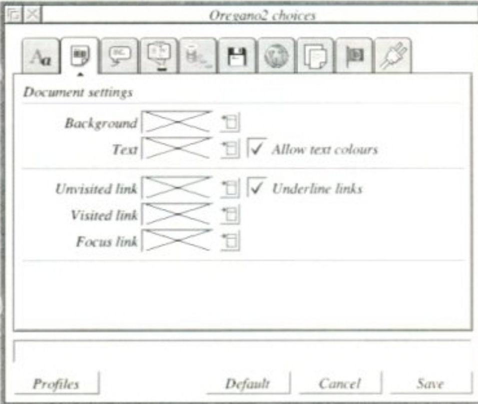
Normally accessing a Web page with Chinese characters will get you a screen full of garbage. The reason being that the huge number of characters needed to represent the language are encoded in two bytes rather than one. Since earlier browsers couldn't handle two byte symbols you got rubbish.

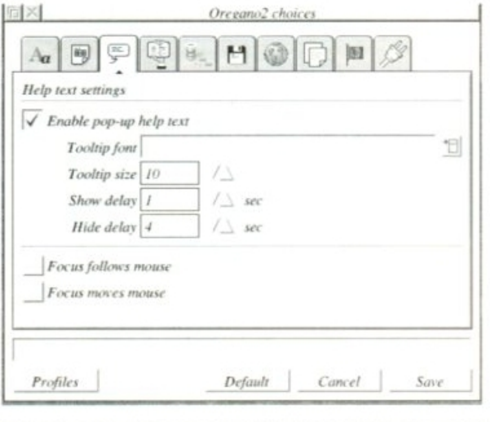
Oregano 2 can handle it and if you don't actually own the fonts you still get a sensible page as shown in Figure I, as compared to the nonsense as shown in Figure Ia. I didn't have the fonts but I could at least make out the structure of the page.

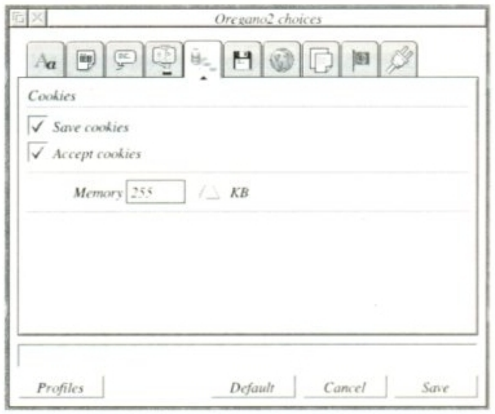
This is, of course, useful and to some it will be very important but for the majority of us it is simply something which will be convenient from time to time.

If asked what is the biggest barrier

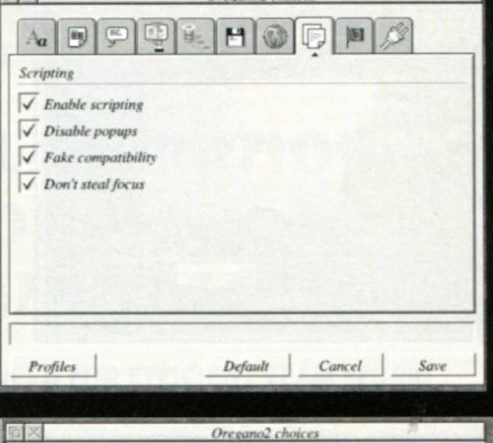


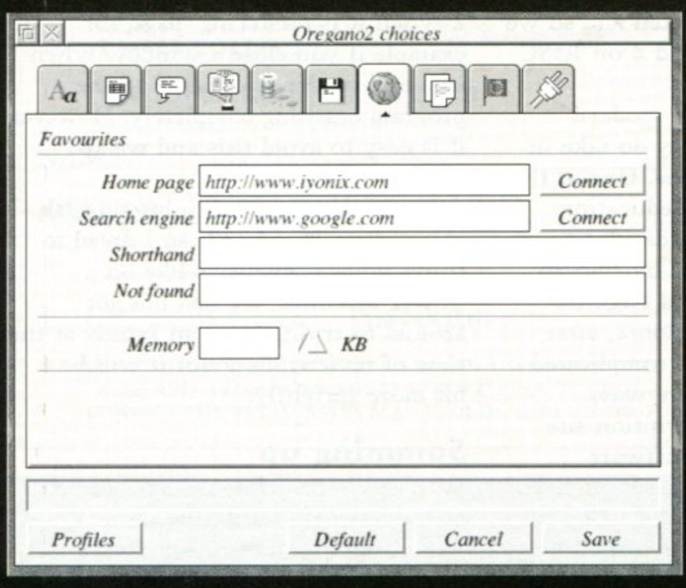


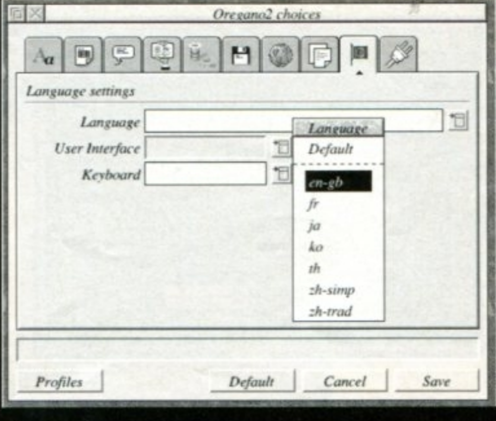


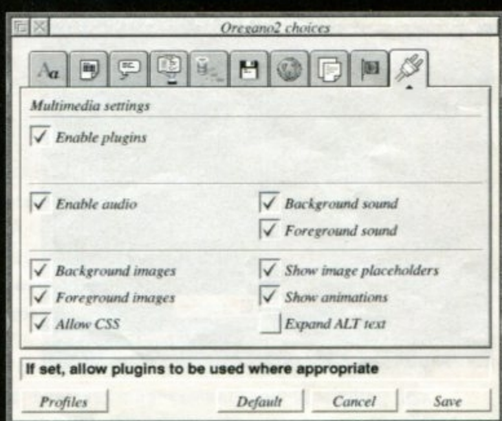


Oregano2 choices
Proxy and cache settings
Proxy HTTP Enable
Proxy HTTPS Enable
Proxy FTP Enable
Proxy Exclude
Cache limit KB
Profiles Default Cancel Save







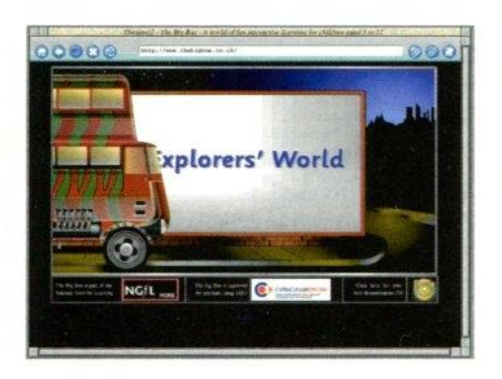


Oregano 2 Features

- HTML 3.2
- HTML 4.0 compliancy on supported elements
- Javascript 1.5 with DOM Level 0
- Secure Sockets Layer (SSL 3.0)
- Cascading Style Sheets 1.0 (except layers)
- Frames with frame history
- Cookies
- Secure Authentication
- In-memory session cache
- JPEG images (including progressive)
- GIF images (including animated)
- PNG images
- WAV sound (including MS ADPCM)
- AU
- MP3 audio
- Macromedia Flash 3.0 and 4.0
- Scalable vector font technology
- Unicode 8 & 16 bit fonts
- ASCII 7 & 8 bit fonts
- BIG5 - Chinese Traditional characters
- GB / HZ - Chinese Simplified characters
- JIS / SJIS / UJIS - Japanese characters
- UKSC - Korean characters
- TIS - Thai characters
- Favourites
- Output: Graphics and HTML
- Suitable for RISC OS 3.5 and above
- Customisable GUI















to using the Internet most RISC OS users will say Flash sites. Flash is a way of creating interactive Web pages, it's really a complete programming language which allows animated graphics and sounds and all sorts of other clever stuff.

As mentioned in the opening to this article it is exactly the kind of product that won't work on RISC OS simply because nobody in the market can afford to buy the licence and create the necessary "renderer".

Because Oregano is actually created by a company outside the RISC OS market for their own purposes and simply bought in by Castle Technology. They do have the financial muscle to get the Flash driver written and so we can now have Flash 3 and 4 on RISC OS.

These are not the most modern versions of Flash but they do take in the majority of Flash sites. One of the most important from an education viewpoint and the one I decided to try was The Big Bus (created by Imparo which was an offshoot of Argonet before they became Freedom2, after which their history gets complicated and doesn't apply here anyway).

The Big Bus is a subscription site containing educational software written in Flash. Up to now we have had absolutely no chance of using it on RISC OS. But now we can. You can see from Figure IIa and IIb, these are what it should look like, Figure II, was what Oregano 1 came up with.

Configuration

Interestingly the configuration for Oregano 2 is dealt with using the ConfiX software written by X-Ample in the Netherlands.

Rather than explicitly going through everything we have resorted to screenshots of each of the ten pages and we will look at highlights:

You can control the fonts thoroughly but only use the fonts supplied with Oregano itself, see my thoughts on this in the next section. There is an option for pop-up help text every time you rest the pointer on something, this can be useful, you can switch it off as well as configure the delay before it appears and the size.

There are certain basic items like the home page to open on as well as the start page. Make the start page blank if you don't want any one to appear. You can also specify which browser Oregano 2 pretends to be in order to get around those Web sites that automatically block non-standard browsers.

Issues arising

While it is not exactly a problem one issue that does arise is that the Oregano 2 uses its own font renderer on the Web pages just as Oregano 1 does. I feel a bit odd about that while I realise and understand the particular reasons for it.

When you view a Web page there is an auto-scroll feature if you get close to the edge at the top, bottom, left or right. I don't like it and I don't seem to be able to find any place to turn it off.

Currently on my system there are issues regarding interrupting Oregano 2 when it is rendering page, for example if you close a window when it is mid-render you may find the program crashing completely. However it is easy to avoid this and we are looking into it.

The application feels a bit sluggish on my Risc PC SA233, so I dread to think what it might be like on a slower machine. We had not got around to trying it on an Iyonix at the time of review, no doubt it will be a bit more sprightly.

Summing up

Web access on RISC OS has been a dodgy business for a long time, something of a lottery whether a site is going to be accessible or not.

Arguably the new (virtually global) legislation that says that all published information must be usable and accessible by handicapped people (in our case accessible by blind or partially sighted individuals) should mean that even the oldest RISC OS browser should be able to access everything on the Web.

You can live with text only if you like but personally I like a little aesthetics with my information. If this new piece of software means that I can sensibly access Flash sites as Flash, and use other sites effectively with their Javascript and other specialist formats, then I am happy.

This is definitely another excellent weaponry in the arsenal of RISC OS software.

Rob Donaldson
editor@acornuser.com

TO SUBSCRIBE TURN TO PAGE 27

Wakefield Show Preview

This year's show will once again have a large charity stand. The stand has raised over £10,500 for charities over the years, all thanks to your generosity. Many people have walked away with incredible bargains on both hardware and software, you never know what you might find unless you have a rummage!

If you wish to bring an item to the show on the day, you can do so, otherwise if you have any items for donation that you wish to send prior to the show weekend please send them to:

FAO Terry Rigg - Wakefield 2003 show
Wakefield Hospice (Fund Raising) Ltd
Hemingway House
Thornes Moor Business Park
Thornes Moor Road
WAKEFIELD
WF2 8PG

They can accept deliveries direct by hand between 8:30 am and 4:00 pm Monday to Friday.

As with previous shows, Wakefield will feature a show theatre, where exhibitors get chance to demonstrate their product in more detail, and allow audience to ask any questions in a public forum. The provisional timetable is as follows:

10:20 Castle Technology
11:20 Brian Jaques
12:10 MicroDigital
13:50 RISCOS Ltd
15:00 Castle Technology

This year's Wakefield Show is bring run over one day only, on Saturday 10th May 2003 from 10:00am to 4.30pm. An impressive array of exhibitors have signed up for the show, including the elusive Microdigital, who rarely attend UK shows and seem to prefer clubs and user groups to demonstration their long-awaited Omega PC.

The confirmed list of exhibitors is as follows:

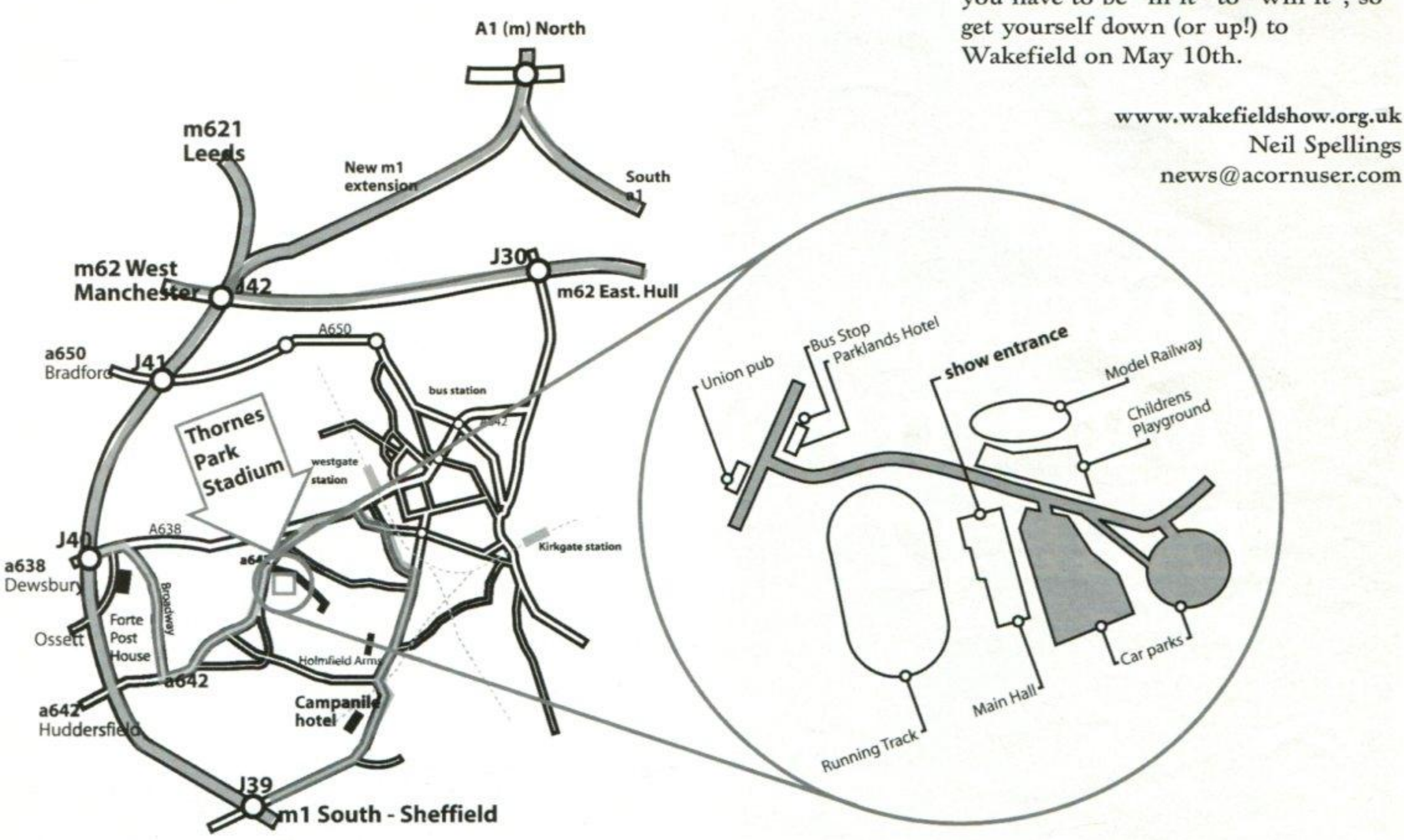
Acorn Publisher
Acorn User
Aemulor/Spellings Computer Services
APDL
Archive Publications
The ARM Club
Brain Games
Castle Technology
The Charity Stand
CJE Micros
Jonathan Duddington
Electric Font Foundry
Etc Systems
Explan Computers
FD Games
Fleur Designs
Fortran Friends
Icon Technology
ITC-UK Ltd
Brian Jaques
MicroDigital
MW Software
PHR Computers
Photodesk Ltd
Really Good Software Company
R-Comp/R-Comp Interactive
RISCOS Ltd Serious Statistical Software
Unix Porting Project (Peter Naulls)
Stuart Tyrrell Developments
Virtual Acorn
Wakefield RISCOS Computer Club

The show is being held at their regular venue, the Thornes Park Athletics Stadium, Horbury Road, Wakefield. Free car parking is available, along with refreshments and childrens playground and steam railway. Admission is £5 payable on the door, with children free if accompanied by a paying adult.

This year's show features a large prize draw; the main prize being a Microdigital Omega computer system. There are many smaller prizes available donated by the various exhibitors attending the show, but you have to be "in it" to "win it", so get yourself down (or up!) to Wakefield on May 10th.

www.wakefieldshow.org.uk

Neil Spellings
news@acornuser.com



Getting there

The best routes are to approach from Junctions 39 and 40 on the M1 and Junction 30 on the M62. In all cases leave the motorway following signs towards Wakefield.

There will be yellow AA road signs very shortly after you have turned off the motorway at junctions 39 and 40 which will lead you directly to the show. If you leave the motorway at either Junction 30 on the M62 or Junction 41 on the M1 follow the signs towards Wakefield and then towards the A61 to Barnsley and you will pick up the AA signs as you get to the Marsh Way ring road in the City.



Approaching North from Barnsley and Doncaster you will pick up the AA signs from the point where the A61 and the A638 join. If you miss the first sign which is very close to the junction, follow the signs for A642 Huddersfield into Ings Road (dual carriageway).

Approaching South by the A1(M) follow the new extension of the M1 to Junction 40.

Note: There are new speed cameras on the the roads from Jct 39 and Jct 40 of the M1 plus on the main Huddersfield to Wakefield roads!

Public Transport

Wakefield has two railway stations, Westgate and Kirkgate. Westgate is much closer to the show venue and it is served by excellent regional, trans Pennine and intercity train services. Many services are direct to Wakefield, but you may need to change trains, probably at Leeds.



The show venue is only 10 minutes walk from Westgate station, or a short bus or taxi ride. The Metro website at **www.wymetro.com** has up to date information on all rail and bus services.

Kirkgate station is small, unmanned and about a mile away from the show. The slow hourly First NW services from Manchester Victoria via Huddersfield reverse at Kirkgate and continue to Westgate.

Many local Metro trains to Kirkgate from Barnsley and Sheffield, continue on to Leeds without stopping at Westgate. In these cases you have the choice of walking or you can ring for a cab.

By bus or coach

Wakefield has a busy bus station in Union Street, served by buses from around the area and also from other major towns and cities, including London. For information on bus and coach services and timetables, contact your local bus station, or call 'Metro' on 0113-245-7676 between 08:00 and 19:00 Monday to Saturday, and 09:00 to 17:30 on Sundays and bank holidays, or check the Web site at **www.wymetro.com**

There is an excellent local service from the bus station to the show venue. There is a taxi rank nearby or you can walk it in 15 minutes.

Local buses

The show venue on Horbury Road is extremely well served by buses travelling from Wakefield Union Street bus station, and/or Wakefield Westgate railway station. The frequency of service, and the number of different routes, ensure that you should not have to wait more than 15 minutes even on Sunday (as long as you are travelling after 09:30). The most frequent services on Saturday are on those routes which also have a Sunday service.

From Westgate railway station, cross the road to the opposite side from the station, turn right and walk down Westgate towards the railway bridge. There is a bus stop just before the bridge. The following route numbers are all suitable:

From Bus Station via Westgate
128 + 129 Dewsbury
265 Netherton

For detailed bus timetables, call 'Metro' on 0113- 245-7676 and ask them to post you the appropriate timetable leaflets. There is no charge for this service.

Tell the driver you wish to alight at Thornes Park Athletics Stadium. The bus stop is outside the Parklands Hotel, and the park entrance is immediately adjacent to the right hand side of the hotel.

By Taxi

There is a minicab taxi rank in Union Street, right behind the bus station, and there is also one immediately outside the doors at Westgate station.

The Show venue is less than five minutes drive away, so the fare shouldn't be too steep. Tell the driver you wish to go to Thornes Park Athletics Stadium.

From Kirkgate Station There is a Taxi office in Monk Street close to the station.

Blueline Taxis: 01924-200-678
Or you can telephone for a cab from:
Fleet Taxis - 01924-379-615
Union Taxis - 01924-364-520
786 Wakefield City Cars - 01924-377-000

By walking (from the city centre)

The show venue is only 15 minutes walk from Wakefield Union Street bus station, and 10 minutes from Wakefield Westgate railway station.

From Bus Station via Westgate

Wakefield has a smart new Bus Station adjacent to the old site in Union Street. As you enter the Bus Station from your bus, leave by the doors at the left hand end into Union Street, and go straight over the Bullring traffic junction, passing Queen Victoria s statue and the pedestrian precinct on your left. Proceed through Marygate, past Barclays Bank on your right, continuing into Westgate, and down the slope towards the railway bridge. Then follow route below:

From Westgate Railway Station

Cross the road to the opposite side from the station, turn right and walk down Westgate towards the railway bridge. (There is a bus stop just before the bridge if you do not wish to walk.) Continue down Westgate (which becomes Westgate End) for about half a mile, and then bear very slightly left towards Horbury and Huddersfield as you pass St Michael's church on your right. The park entrance is on the left, immediately after the Parklands Hotel.

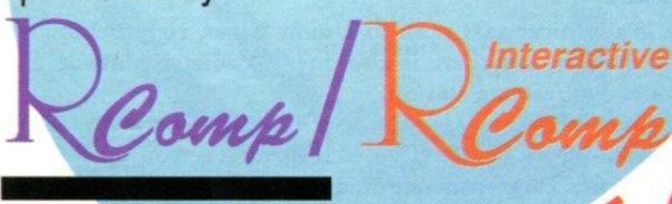
Wakefield 2003

The Acorn RISC OS Computer Show

Thornes Park Athletics Stadium
Horbury Road
Wakefield

Saturday 10th May 2003
10:00am - 4:30pm

Sponsored by





Spellings Computer Services



Attractions include
Show Theatre
Charity Stall
Small Developers Village
Catering

Free Car Parking
AA Signposted

Show organised by



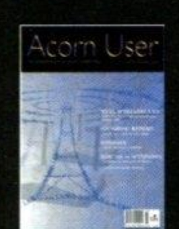


Entry £5.00
Under 16's Free (if accompanied by Adult)

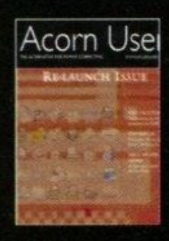
Website: http://www.wakefieldshow.org.uk/

Email: showinfo@wrocc.org.uk

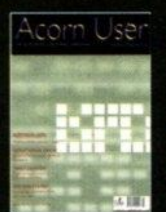
Subscriptions



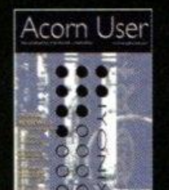
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- SWShow report in full
- Fido Net more bite than bark
- S-Base gets into print



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- Wireless LAN revealed
- Mini PC reviewed
- And even more besides



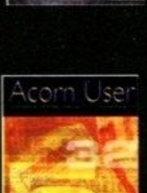
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- USB Programming
- Iyonix and the future



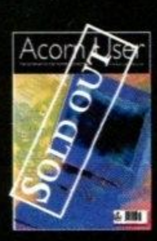
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- Viral marketing how you use it
- RISC OS vs Windows, more in the difference
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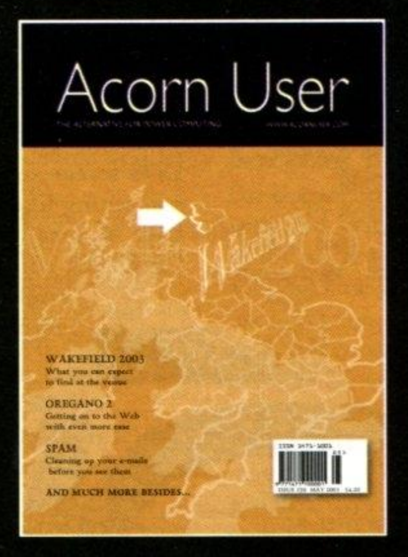
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- Web marketing, how to really do it
- Web hosting, what it really means
- S-Base



Issue 252
November 2002
- ADSL & SDSL explained
- Computer crime, doing the dirty
- USB -- making connections
- S-Base



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- Getting termites into the program
- Making connections with USB
- Converting to RISC OS from Windows
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The Frighteners

This is the final part of our look at RISC OS and Windows as two different types of operating system cooperating in the real world. Sometime people try to think of Windows as "the Enemy", this is not a profitable line of thought. Windows is just an operating system run by what some consider to be an unscrupulous company.

Whether that is true or not, it is certainly very well marketed, but the reality does not really match up to the hype. It is only an operating system but sometimes it can seem like a monster.

Occasionally it is a monster that produces frightening sounding error messages: what are you supposed to do when presented with 'This program has caused an illegal operation and will be terminated. If this problem persists, please contact software vendor'. If it's a Microsoft application running on a Microsoft operating system, then how could it possibly perform an 'illegal operation'?

I feel that these messages on Windows, treating users like idiots, are one of the reasons users are starting to switch away from Windows to alternative systems.

Perhaps Windows' most frightening error is the "blue screen of death" where a serious error causes Windows to exit and a white on blue DOS screen to appear saying something like "your hard disc could have become corrupt - please let CHKDSK run." What could be more frightening to an inexperienced user in thinking they could have destroyed all their data on the hard disc? The worst I've seen a RISC OS machine do, is just to freeze completely, a situation that a reboot normally rectifies.

To those of us who've used other WIMP systems (like RISC OS), the perception of Windows is that it appears to be a very unstable environment. I would not disagree. I've programmed mainframes, minicomputers and Beebs, of all these PCs running Windows are by far the most unreliable. However that said, they have become more robust, Windows 3.1 had to be rebooted if a program failed!

Windows still has irritations where buttons can be clicked, can be seen to depress, but the functionality behind the button doesn't trigger, but doing the same thing again a few seconds afterwards works! This persists into Windows XP, so I expect it will also be true of Windows 2003 (supposed to be a challenge to Unix but doesn't make the grade). I should perhaps point out that it also happens on Mac OS (at least up to version 9). Was it only the developers of RISC OS that got it right?

On Windows, applications occasionally just seem to stop working, with no apparent reason. The icon remains on the taskbar, but doesn't appear in the Task Manager, so cannot be terminated short of a full reboot. Although occasionally RISC OS hangs, it is extremely infrequent, and not normally associated with an Acorn or RISC OS Ltd program. I think it's a telling point that the Reset button on a PC is on the front!

I feel that PCs have slowed business processes a great deal. Mainframes didn't have the visual attractiveness that Windows has, having command line screens, but they ran programs very fast, and very, very seldom needed to be rebooted, a reboot of a mainframe indicated a major problem or upgrade taking place.

Acorn software is usually far, far easier to remove from your system, all you have to do is delete the application directory. In some cases items are written into !Boot files, which makes things harder, but there isn't the mess, and potential for a useless machine that can be left when deinstalling Windows installed software.

The RISC OS equivalent error to Windows' Illegal Operation is more helpful: "Application may have gone wrong : Describe, Quit or Cancel".

RISC OS does have its share of cryptic and frightening messages, but these are generally more helpful than on Windows. For example, trying to read an 'alien' format floppy disc on Windows (say, a RISC OS formatted one) gives the following on Windows 95:

```
A:\ is not accessible
The device is not ready
Retry or Cancel
```

or the even less helpful Windows NT equivalent:

```
A:\ is not accessible
The drive cannot find the sector
requested
Retry or Cancel
```

whereas a similar message on RISC OS would be:

```
Disc not understood - has it been
formatted?
```

To put this in a more simple form: Windows gives you a technical description of why it couldn't do what you asked it to, rather than explaining what's gone wrong and what you need to do to fix the problem, which RISC OS is more likely to do.

COM vs Relocatable

Windows provides for COM (Component Object Model) components which create components (programs to you or I) that can be called by using 'exposed' entry points or 'methods'. These components contain something called a GUID (Global User IDs) which must match, otherwise components will not run, and strange output can be received.

There is a major issue in that each module must be 'binary compatible' with its neighbours - i.e. all referenced functions and calls must match the reference GUID of the called or

calling component. It's really complicated.

RISC OS provides something very similar to COM components, but they're far simpler, far easier to understand, and far easier to implement: Relocatable Modules. Relocatable Modules run in the RMA (Relocatable Module Area) of memory which is maintained by RISC OS. They can be used to seamlessly extend the operating system, can be used by any program that knows the SWI codes and don't suffer from the complications of Binary Compatibility. A replacement, is exactly that, it replaces the previous module, there's no need for 'binary compatibility'. They can also be updated on-the-fly, unless in use and involved in a "session" with a client program.

Conclusion

Although Windows gives the impression that it should be business-like, reliable and easy-to-use, it isn't. I consider that RISC OS is far more professional because it is a system that can be trusted to do whatever is required of it.

If I have to do any piece of work on a computer system at home, I invariably reach for my RISC OS machine. Like most RISC OS users I own a PC, but this is generally regarded as a 'second class' machine and is only used if I have to do stuff on the Internet where my RISC OS software won't support a particular site, or if I want to do a bit of 'Armchair Flying' on Flight Simulator, or to scan from my scanner. I only use this PC to use software I have on PC that I don't have available for the Acorn platform.

The Windows environment looks more professional than that on RISC OS, but is in effect merely an attractive stage-set: looks pretty on the audience's side, but behind the scenes it's a mess of props, string and complications. Not only that but behind the pretty facade is a clunky irritating interface that owes more to pre-1980s philosophy than an understanding of what people need.

To me, Windows and DOS environments are a poor implementation of a mainframe environment translated onto small computers. Networking (introduced in Windows 3.11) is generally an afterthought and, although it works, there are inconsistencies in security.

Mr Gates' marketing department encourages us to upgrade our computer (well, PC) hardware frequently, to me there is no perceptible speed increase from the humble Windows 3.1. Although new Windows systems do so much more than the original, my personal feeling is that Microsoft have 'lost the plot'.

There's so many bells and whistles on the later versions of windows, that they've forgotten what a good program is, or indeed what their users actually want. I've run 'old' Windows 3.1 on a Pentium 75Mhz machine and it's really fast, comparable with RISC OS speeds.

RISC OS looks like a simple implementation of Windows. Any PC-pro person would probably consider it a graphically weak copy of Windows. However, RISC OS is far superior, and it came well before Windows 95. It is simple and that is where it's beauty lies. It does everything 'it says on the tin', without complaint.

Although there are what I consider important omissions in RISC OS (for example, keyboard support), it has achieved what it set out to do, create a simple operating system that a child (or toddler?) or even we elder users can pick up easily. The general company methodology behind Acorn's systems seems to be 'make it simple'.

As we all know from experience, simple things are easy to understand, and this important aspect has not been forgotten by the RISC OS software and hardware developers. Indeed, reading in Acorn User I've found out that our computers are some of the only machines available to be able to be powered by standalone solar-power in the third-world. PCs require too much energy to be powered by the sun.

RISC OS's speed is a joy to behold! The reason it has not perhaps become as 'refined' as Windows (if such a term can be applied to such an OS), is because of its smaller user base. The fact that it is still going, and going strong despite Acorn no longer existing, in the face of such devastating competition is a tribute to the initial design of the OS (and the hardware). Who knows if Microsoft are doing the same. They're probably too big to care and just addressing issues they think big businesses want?

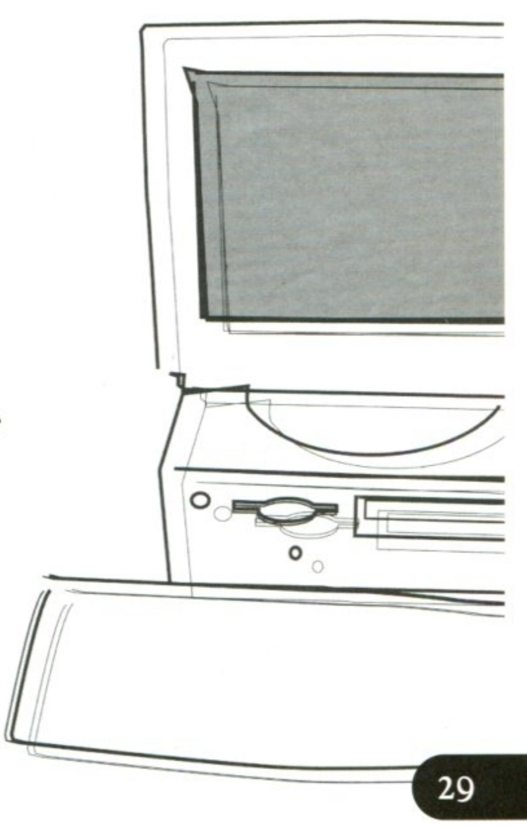
RISC OS is not, perhaps as 'whizzy' as Windows, but it is solid, and there's a feeling of reliability about it. You know when you ask RISC OS to do something, it will go off and do it, and not complain needlessly. It is rewarding to be able to guess what RISC OS will do, and get it right, I feel it really is very intuitive. It does have its limitations, but these can pretty much be eradicated through judicial use of shareware.

I really believe that Acorn's former slogan "The choice of experience" sums up why we RISC OS-users remain so loyal to a platform that PCers consider 'old hat'. I hate using Windows. I don't feel confident using it (and I use it every day) it makes me stressed and therefore I don't like it.

I don't deny that Microsoft have indeed added some superb functions into their software, but to me these benefits are greatly offset by the multitude of little niggly things that prevent you using these products effectively. I always enjoy using RISC OS. I am aware of its deficiencies as far as Windows is concerned, but I always more relaxed using it. I know it's highly unlikely to let me down, and that if I'm missing a tool to work on RISC OS, the probability is that something is available in freeware/shareware. Indeed some shareware is better than its commercial Windows equivalent, take Chris Morison's excellent Organizer for example!

For my money I'd far rather use a reliable computer system. I have never sworn at anything like I swear at PCs and especially MS Word. If I have to do anything on a computer system my 'choice of experience' is RISC OS. There's only one Windows system that I think comes close to RISC OS in speed (but not reliability) and that's running Windows 3.1 on a Pentium!

Andy Burgess
(ajburgess@argonet.co.uk)



RISC OS Ideas Club

Here is another in my occasional series on possible improvements to RISC OS, this time I want to look at menus and what we can learn from other places to enhance them.

We may not like the Windows operating system as a whole, it is not pretty and it is ungainly and awkward to use. The decorative improvements in Windows XP in my experience have not added to workability, frankly they have reduced it yet further.

For example, shutting down on pre-XP versions could be achieved by hitting the Windows key to bring up the Start menu, pressing the up arrow key to select Shutdown and pressing Return twice. Not quite as fast as pressing Shift + Control + F12, but not too bad. On XP the Start menu has been "improved" and you can't do it anymore.

But I digress. Windows is ungainly and awkward but some applications are quite good and some features in those applications are worth looking at as copiable.

The feature I am considering right now probably has a proper name in Windows but I don't know it so I shall have to just describe it:

In some applications you can set a flag which detects (on a continuing basis) the frequency with which you select certain menu options. After a while it notices that, perhaps, there are some menu options you never select while there are other you select much more often.

It then starts to customise the menus, it makes the ones you don't use disappear off the menu. In one particular application that I use regularly one of the menus only contains a single item because I never use anything else off that menu.

So the question then arises, how do you get to see the other options on the menu, if you do need them?

Windows provides two options: You can either double-click on the button, on the menu bar, that brought up the menu in the first place; well it ends up being a triple-click really, click once for the short menu, click shuts the menu, click three brings up the full menu.

Also you automatically get an additional menu item at the bottom of the menu "More..." which, when clicked, rebuilds the menu with all the options in place. You also get a very ugly method of differentiating between the items that are regulars and those which are usually hidden. It's very distracting and of no help whatsoever.

Into RISC OS

So let us now look at how this can be translated into RISC OS so that it is logical, intuitive and does not detract from normal usage. The first point to note is that it should probably be a global option provided by the Wimp itself. The standard (internal) menu structure cannot support this feature so a new, expanded, structure would need to be implemented to permit it.

Assuming that we have a new global structure (the old structure would continue to work, of course) and a globally configurable option, how is it going to look?

RISC OS does not have a menu bar at the top of every window, it just has menus popping up wherever we want menus to be. Assuming that control of "which menu items appear" is taken care of, the only thing we have to think about is: How do we get the rest of the menu to appear?

We could add an additional menu item but I think we can say "awkward and clunky" to that. Instead a simple extension is to add the size toggle icon to the title bar of the menu. Doing this you can both expand and contract the menu simply by clicking on the size toggle. Since it is a click on the title bar it won't make the menu disappear.

On the technical side

There are issues to be considered when thinking about the actual implementation of these shrinkable menus. The way it is implemented on Windows the information about the menu state is saved between sessions of the application. It is not really worthwhile unless you do this.

This means that, most likely, you will have two data structures: The first is the new improved menu structure itself and the second will be the current "display status". This will be something that can be saved as a small block of data when the program quits.

RISC OS menus do have another limitation which other menu systems don't usually have. Currently you can only mark a menu item as selected or not, for which you get a tick, or not. On other operating systems you can usually have alternative selection systems as well.

If we are playing with the internal data structures of menus why not extend them to allow different markers? Just in case an application needs an alternative? The best way to achieve this would probably be, rather than allowing total anarchy, provide an additional number of flags and allow those to be set and cleared individually.

My final extension to the system would be to be able to specify a maximum entry size to a menu. When that size is reached the scroll bars automatically appear, even if the menu hasn't reached the full height of the screen. It's a little thing but it might make more manageable windows.

Conclusion

The RISC OS menu system is extremely good. But extremely good doesn't mean it couldn't be improved. These are ideas and if any developer of RISC OS wants to implement them, I won't ask for a royalty.

Steve Turnbull
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Save the Whale

Solid-state pen drives are all the rage outside of the RISC OS market. We haven't really had the opportunity to play with them simply because we haven't had the drivers (where have I heard that before?).



These pen drives are simply mass storage devices and what they need are mass storage USB drivers in order to read and write to them.

This has been a problem with the rather tight RISC OS market. The argument runs something like this: The Windows market is huge, therefore any manufacturer of a pen drive would do well to provide Windows drivers for their hardware. It is cost-effective. USB mass drivers can operate generically, so for a computer like an Apple Macintosh it is reasonable for the company to provide generic mass storage drivers. Which they did. As it happens more modern versions of Windows also have generic drivers.

For RISC OS, no manufacturer is going to waste time producing a dedicated driver for their hardware. And apparently no computer manufacturer (or operating system supplier) wants to bother providing a generic mass storage driver for USB hardware. No matter how sensible that might be.

Where does that leave us? At the doorway of Stuart Tyrrell and his MagicStar MP3 player.

This unit is a mass storage device with automatic MP3 playback capability. You can use it to store and transfer data, but if you use its MP3 playback it will automatically search out the MP3 files in store and play them through the supplied headphones. Neat.

The MagicStar Gray Whale has 64MB of built-in memory, transfers data at up to 12Mbit per second and plugs straight into a free USB port on your computer, whether it is a USB card or a standard USB port.

If this were a PC you would find that the Gray Whale has a lot of additional facilities. In fact the unit comes with its standard PC drivers so you can get those extra facilities if you have a PC too. It has remote e-mail software which means that, with a PC, you can access your software from any computer you can plug in to (it's just like R2D2 on the Death Star).

It is very light indeed and has a compact and modern design. There is an LED indicator to show when the MP3 player is in use and it slides apart to make the battery and USB plug accessible.

However it really isn't easy to get it to come apart, the smooth and trendy design makes the USB cover hard to remove and the battery cover cannot be removed without a small screwdriver. The instructions, in a form of English I thought had been lost years ago, imply wrongly that it is really easy. I thought I was going to break it.

However you don't really need to take the battery cover off, the unit charges itself from the USB port when you plug it in. A couple of hours of charging will keep your playback running for quite a few hours. The actual time depends on your earphones but the supplied ones should keep you going for about 10 hours at least.

The RISC OS software is not fancy, it is a simple driver called MassFS. In fact it doesn't even pop-up on the iconbar unless it recognises that a USB storage device has been plugged in. Specifically the device that it has been programmed to respond to.

There is only a single control on the player. A single wheel which rotates to control volume, and can be clicked to play and clicked to pause. Turning the wheel fast jumps you to the next or previous track.

There are a couple of LEDs: the power LED shows orange when the unit is charging or green for fully charged. While the Play LED is red for playing, fast flashing red for "no MP3s found" and slow flashing for paused. A green LED indicates reading and writing activity as a removable disk.

Finally, for security, there is a small switch on the side of the unit which write-protects the disk contents.

All-in-all this is a great little unit, with absolutely no competition in the RISC OS market. It will only work on the Simtec USB for the moment.

Rob Donaldson
editor@acornuser.com

Specifications



Current available: 64MB / 128MB / 256MB
- Support music format: MP3
- Earphone jack: 2.5 mm
- Audio output: 5mW + 5mW
- Output frequency range: 20HZ 20KHZ
- Battery: Lithium-ION 500mA 3.7V, continue using player at lease 6 hours at full-charge.
- Support USB specification revision 1.1
- Transferring rate up to 12Mbit per second at "Full Speed".
- Support power saving mode to reduce power consumption while no playing MP3.
- Write / delete protection switch.
- Durable solid-state storage data retention for at least 10 years.
- Erase Cycles: 1,000,000 times
- No external power is required, DC 4.5V ~ 5.5V from USB port.
- Low Power consumption Write 39.1mA ~ 39.4mA / Read 35.0mA ~ 36.1mA.
- Read/Write Speed of USB interface: Read 800KB / Write 600KB
- Size: 91.2 x 30.4 x 26.3 mm
- Unit weight: 30g (not including battery)



RISC OS Academy

Online education is definitely the next big thing, what with LearnDirect for the general population and SAM Learning revision for schools, both reporting specific successes, the Internet is set to become a real education tool.

Paul Vigay is a well-known name in the RISC OS world, in fact not only one of the most well-known but also one of the most prolific and busy. Knowing how much he gets up to I am always surprised at how much he gets done, perhaps his days are longer than everyone else's.

One of his most recent enterprises has been the RISC OS Academy which is basically a Web site with extensive tutorials on RISC OS basics, programming in different languages and so on.

The basic courses are free but then you join the Academy for one year and can do any of the courses available in that time.

It has been designed for newcomers who want to obtain that little bit more from their RISC OS computer. It's also aimed at PC and Mac users who are thinking about upgrading to a RISC OS computer, or buying one as a second machine in order to learn programming or Web design.

Because all the courses within the RISC OS Academy are designed from the ground up and intended for people with no previous experience, all jargon and technical terms are explained, both in the text of the lessons as well as via a separate glossary of terms.

The courses have been designed the courses as a series of lessons. Lesson one introduces the subject, giving a broad outline of what will be taught, and pointers to any additional resources or information you may require in order to continue through the lessons.

Each lesson is completely self-contained but builds from each previous one so that you can work at your own speed, either by working through a lesson whenever you have some free time, or you can skip between lessons for reference and refreshing your memory once you've mastered the topic of each lesson.

There are also mini tests in some topics so you can recap and test your knowledge on particular aspects of the course. All tests are accompanied by worked answers and explanations, so you can work through them at your own speed, or go back to recap certain topics which may be confusing.

Some courses are shorter than others and basically serve to introduce various aspects of RISC OS for people who have perhaps never used it before, or experimenting for the first time.

Bearing in mind that the courses are also aimed at non-RISC OS people and RISC OS beginners, a secondary aim of the RISC OS Academy is to enthuse people enough that they develop their own software for RISC OS and in turn improve the RISC OS software scene.

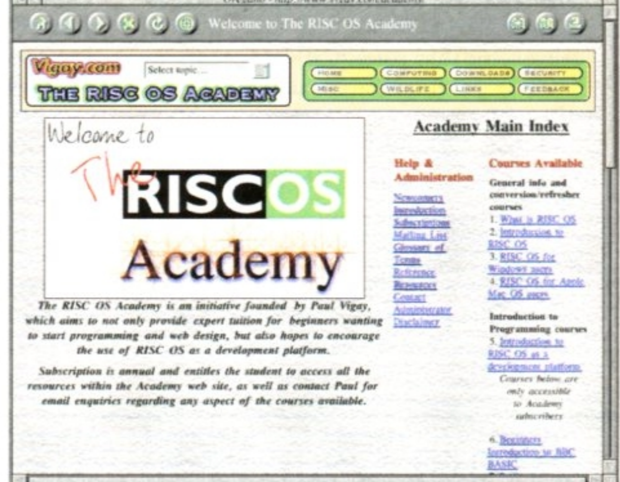
Paul says "It's my opinion, gained over 20 years of using computers, that RISC OS is by far the best platform for designing Web sites. It's clarity, ease of use and excellent tools make it more efficient and productive for designers to create effective and functional web sites with the minimum of stress. I hope that Windows users and Apple Mac users examine RISC OS as a viable (and more productive) working environment to aid their web design work."

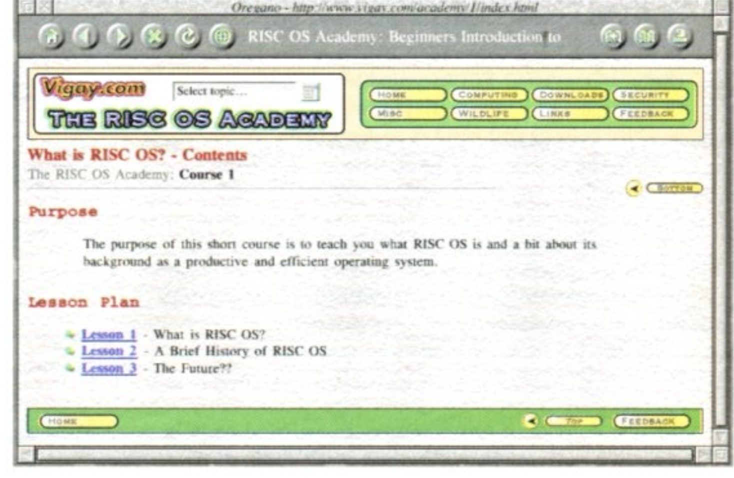
Subscriptions run for a year from the date of your payment being received.

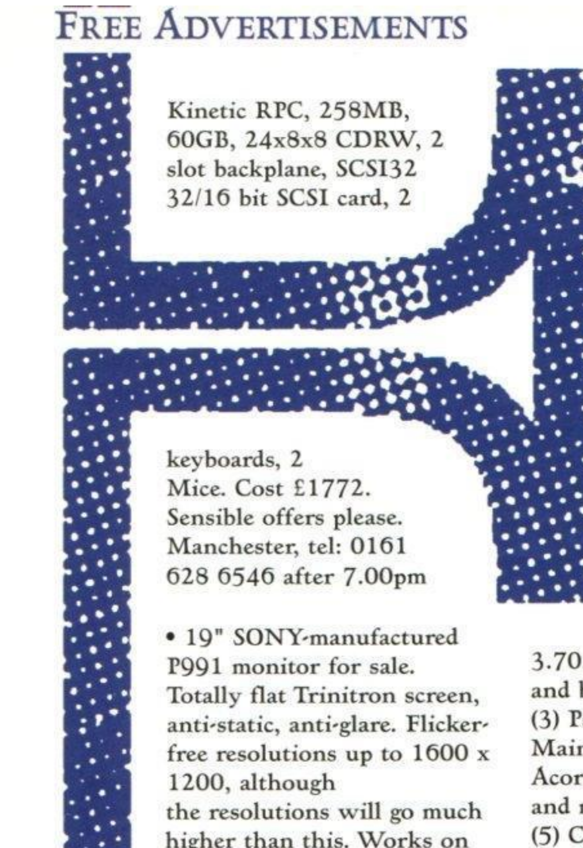
During the time of your membership you may freely access all courses and resource material within the www.vigay.com/academy/private/ Web site, and obtain access to the Academy mailing list.

Annual charges are as follows: Single user £50 and family membership (more than one person in the same household) £75.00.









Kinetic RPC, 258MB, 60GB, 24x8x8 CDRW, 2 slot backplane, SCSI32 32/16 bit SCSI card, 2 keyboards, 2 Mice. Cost £1772. Sensible offers please. Manchester, tel: 0161 628 6546 after 7.00pm

• 19" SONY-manufactured P991 monitor for sale. Totally flat Trinitron screen, anti-static, anti-glare. Flicker-free resolutions up to 1600 x 1200, although the resolutions will go much higher than this. Works on RISC OS, PC and Mac systems. Excellent condition, can be seen working. £280 and will include Impression Publisher (StrongARM), Destiny (RISC OS Doom-like game) and delivery in that price. Call 0113 246 5303 or email ms@arenaman.com

• Vantage £70, ArtWorks (latest CC StrongARM version) £40, Photodesk Olympic £35, Oregano £25, RiScript £20, Messenger Pro (26bit) £15. Everything includes manuals, original disks and postage and packaging. Call 0113 246 5303 or email ms@arenaman.com

For sale: Epson GT9000 flatbed scanner, ports for SCSI and parallel, original instructions and "image master" software. Collect from Bournemouth. Offers to Pete: 01202 768960

•Acorn items for sale:
[1] Single slice Risc PC. ARM610; 6MB RAM; 1MB VRAM; 420MB HD; Cumana CD-ROM; RISC OS 3.50. Original mouse, keyboard, manuals and boxes.
(2) Two slice Risc PC. StrongARM SA-110; 64MB RAM; 2MB VRAM; 2GB HD; 24-speed CD-ROM; RISC OS 3.70. Original Mouse, keyboard, manuals and boxes.
(3) Psion Series 3c PDA. 2MB RAM; Mains adaptor; Leather Case; PsiRisc Acorn link software. All original boxes and manuals. (4) Cumana SCSI2 Podule.
(5) CJE 5x86 PC second processor card for RiscPC. 133MHz, 512k cache. Comes with PCPro software.
(6) Computer Concepts LaserDirect4 laser printer plus podule. All software and original manuals.
(7) Epson GT9000 A4 flatbed SCSI scanner. Original boxes and manuals.
(8) Software (all boxed with manuals and bits): Artworks; Eureka v3; Ovation Pro; Impression 2; Fireworkz Pro; Mr Clippy; ImageFS 2; SparkFS; Keystroke; PCSound Professional; Wina95FS; WMF IT; Clip IT; ImageMaster; ANT Internet Suite 2; Compression; ArcFax; Virtualise; Font Directory 2; Touch Type; PublishArt; PublishArt 2. Any reasonable offers for all items (or combination of items) above. P&P charged at cost or available to collect.
Contact Jon Aylwin 029 2041 0678 or jon@aylwin.org.uk

• Two Master 128s, 3 disc drives, 1 Cub Monitor, 2 mice, software, £50 buyer collects. East Kent Coast. **Phone 01303 873364.**

•Wanted: All Acorn A3000s, A3010s, A3020s, A4000s, A5000s, A4s, Risc PC 600 & 700s, StrongARM Risc PC's, Kinetic Risc PCs. Anything considered. Can travel. **07930 507815 or 07775 776217.**

• Acorn A5000 including monitor etc plus additional software including Advance suite. Any sensible offer considered. **Contact Robert on 0191 5191231 or at robertvardill@beeb.net**

• Eagle M2 multimedia card; replay video production, HQ video stills, digital stereo sound sampler, full MIDI IN/OUT/THRU facilities, RISCPC compatible. Offers around £160. Multimedia software; Midiworks, Prosound, Cineworks (includes AppleFS) and Genesis Professional £35 each plus postage or £120 for all three. Eagle M2 plus all four packages £250 plus postage. **Enquires or offers 0151 547 3993 or email aokai@tiscali.co.uk**

• A two foot stack of Acorn User magazines for sale, complete with cover discs, from Sept 1994 to end 2001. Also other Acorn magazines and discs. Best offer secures this 12kg pile. **Tel. Coventry, 02476 319519**

• Wanted: All Acorn A3000s, A3010s, A3020s, A4000s, A5000s, A4s, Risc PC 600 & 700s, StrongARM Risc PC's, Kinetic Risc PCs. Anything considered. Can travel. **07930 507815 or 07775 776217.**

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Full access

Some innovative utility companies are developing a way to send high-speed Internet access via ubiquitous power lines, of all things, making every electrical outlet an always-on web connection. Industry watchers in the US say that if the emerging technology works, it has the potential to help close the technology access gap in rural communities, bringing parents of students who live in remote areas into the digital age quickly.

Web news

Safety Clicks (**www.safetyclicks.com**) is aimed at 5 to 8-year olds via AOL. Simple and free, this Flash-based site contains a cartoon introduction to Internet safety as well as a simple quiz for children. There are questions such as, "If a stranger asks you to download a game, should you do it?" and it then gives you three options. A good way to start a group discussion about correct Internet procedure. There is also a simulated chat robot where you can type in a question and receive an automated reply, these mostly seem to be "talk to an adult".

Scholastic are better known in the US in the UK which is a shame. So take this opportunity to log on to a couple of their latest Web sites.

Harry Potter, **www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/home.asp**, is a must for fans aged over 7. There is a synopsis of each book and interviews. While the site focuses on the character's relationships and their learning and educational experiences at Hogwarts it also promotes the latest book and watch out for toy and fast food adverts. Don't miss the Wizard's Challenge. This is a quiz where questions are submitted by children who are also given a chance to contribute to the gallery and discussion form.

The Magic School Bus, **www.scholastic.com/magicschoolbus**, is an online area where children can explore their interest in science topics through games and activities. There are Guided Tours through Animals, Insects, Marine Life, Space as well as the Human Body. Each tour comes with games and pop-up quizzes, video clips and the like. You'll also find study guides, lesson plans and kitchen science experiments ideal for Science Clubs.

Although aimed at the US market, National Geographic Kids Homework Help, **www.nationalgeographic.com/homework**, is a great help with research-style homework for 7 to 12-year olds. Combining resources from the National Geographic and Encyclopaedia Britannica children can look up information in the Concise Encyclopaedia and also access homework-related areas of the National Geographic Web site.

There you'll find that content is divided into a range of subject areas: Animals, History and Culture, Maps and Geography, Art, Places and Nature. A nice touch comes in the form of a dictionary and thesaurus. Not the easiest of sites to navigate, especially for less experienced browsers, but a reliable resource for children to use.

Degrees may never be the same again

UltraLab have announced a new approach to undergraduate degrees with a new action-based, online degree. Aimed at people in full-time work the degrees are full time too and there is no charge for most students. But how do they manage all this?

Named Ultraversity, the goal is to build into the diversity of degrees by provision with links and partnerships with other universities. The key characteristics of the project degrees are: you study what you do on the lines of NVQ qualifications with students building on the expertise students have and taking them further; the core of the degree is action research; the degree ends with each student building an exhibition of their action research with the exhibitions being in community spaces such as schools and libraries; a national network of experts will contribute to the learning community; the learning and research will build into a body of research to build upon; Ultralab will be working with a number of universities but initially the first 500 students will be registered with Anglia Polytechnic University; the degree is entirely online with 24-hour access, 365 days a year. There isn't a mass of content online but rather support, ideas, and help.

There aren't courses as such which may dissuade some people. The reason being that each individual follows a personal, supported pathway not usually possible before PhD level.

There will be an annual tuition fee of £1200 but there is no residential element, no major book costs and so on. Worth noting is that there is no tuition fee at all for the first 500 to register which you can do online at **www.degree.ultralab.net**

Log it

Recording heart rate, testing pH and measuring acceleration are just of the few tests that can be made using logging software and hardware from Data Harvest (+44 1525 373666). However, this is even easier with the new simplified EasySense Flash Logger. A totally new portable data logging system.

Priced at £125 it provides everything students need to record and analyse data automatically identifying the wide variety of SmartQ sensors that can be attached to the unit from temperature to magnetic field and motion.



Picture perfect

Kudlian Soft (+44 7000 583542) have won the Best Primary Resource award at this year's Education Resource Awards for Pictogram - a data handling package for Key Stages 1 and 2. Roy Barker, Director of BESA and the Chair of the judging panel remarked: " The judges were very impressed with this product. They saw it as a simple and very effective piece of software, which is time-saving for teacher and easy and intuitive to use for the target age group. It would prove equally effective on an interactive whiteboard as it would on a standalone classroom computer." Pictogram costs £25.50 and take a look for yourself at **www.kudlian.net**



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Acorn A4 laptop	£260†
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80GB IDE Hard Disc (7200rpm)	£125
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FPM RAM 64MB £50 **128MB £90**

32bit C/C++ (Still 50% off!) *Limited stocks*	£103
ZIP 100MB SCSI S/H (External £120)	£65
S/H 24i16 1MB	£270
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Two port MyHopper2 KVM inc cables	£85
Canon S400 4 Ink tanks inc driver	£120
Canon S750 4 Ink tanks inc driver *Special offer*	£200
Psion 5MX (Ericsson MC218)	£260†
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Book works

Searching for resources can take forever. Looking for the right literacy text can be time consuming and ultimately uninspiring for students. But can you spare your stress levels and literacy budget by going online? In essence there are two approaches. The first gives you a details of quality text linked to specific year groups and text genre/type.

So let's dive in, courtesy of the Devon School Library Service, **www.devon.gov.uk/eal/dsls/acrobat/Fiction%20linked%20NLS_9.pdf**

Although this site only covers fiction it provides a 21-page PDF file which aims to support teachers looking for titles to meet text level requirements. A large file and understandably not comprehensive, yet it makes an excellent starting point with texts listed under NLS range categories and year group from Year 1 to Year 6.

Government help

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy/teaching_resources/?nls=fres&root_top_id=914

The standards site provides information on how to use texts for Key Stage 2 and texts for children learning English as an additional language (EAL). These texts are updated irregularly so I'd recommend downloading what is there and check back regularly.

Select the year you are interested in, for instance Year 3, and you're presented with a selection of PDF files ordered by Term. Each text, from John Brown's Rose and the Midnight Cat to a non-chronological report on Ancient Egypt, comes with a short description as well as listing the specific NLS objectives covered. Open the PDF file and you'll find pages outlining the key writing targets, key reading targets as well as selected NLS framework objectives.

The text itself is not there but there are details of author, publishers and so on, and the reason for the text choice. Then comes the meat with detailed advice on how to use the text as shared whole class work, how to read the text with the class linking in the NLS Spelling Bank. There is also advice on shared writing work and independent work linked with the NLS Grammar for Writing as appropriate. Finally, there is extension, consolidation and homework ideas.

Literacy Time

http://curriculum.becta.org.uk/literacy/index.html

Hosted by BECTA this is a site to encourage teachers to incorporate ICT in Literacy. As well as examples of good practice there are featured activities for the month for Key Stage 1 and 2. For instance for Key Stage 2 there's a reading database aimed at Year 4 where children use the Internet to research a favourite author, and to create a database to help plan future reading.

A useful site linked to latest government developments and advice but I use it for the Reading links. Choose your year and term are you're presented with the details of relevant texts in print, on CD-ROM or on the Internet, for instance, Creation Stories and Traditional Wisdom, **www.ozemail.com.au/%7Ereed/global/mythstor.html**

An excellent starting point. But where can you find texts and those added extras to make authors come alive? Enter the second approach which gives you access to actual text saving money and although rarely pretty to look at you can take the text and incorporate it into your favourite word processor or desktop publisher ready for working with.

Copyright means that you are unlikely to find whole books, authors have to eat too! But it is great for traditional stories and older stories and the Children's Literature Web Guide is your index in a very scattered world of words.

Folktales old and new

A very accessible site is Folklore, Myth and Legend (**www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/storfolk.html**) with brief versions of over 300 Aesop's fables, Hans Christian Andersen and Grimm also feature, though they will need some editing for younger children for vocabulary and content. Then there's Nathaniel Hawthorne's Wonderbook for Girls and Boys. I've still got my Dad's pre-war copy of this but the retellings of classical myths still work today.

Add to this Andrew Lang's versions of the Arabian Nights, entertainments, miscellaneous and less well known oriental and nordic myths and this is a great resource. Also look out for the Encylopedia Mythica which is a quick reference to gods, goddesses and monsters from a wide range of world folklore. Bookmark this one now.

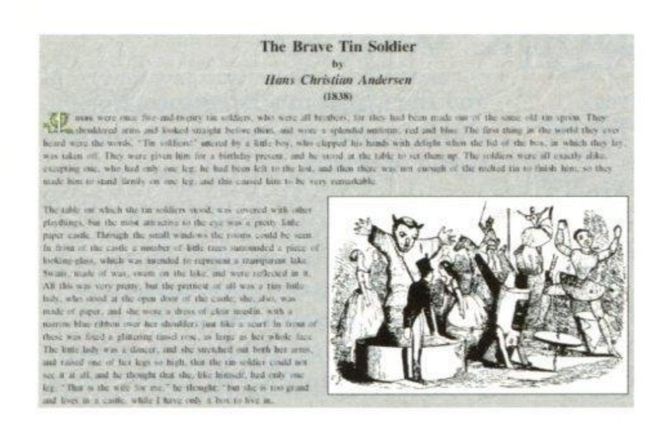
Out of copyright favourites

Once you start digging you find that a surprising number of children's literature classics are out of copyright and so the full text is now available on the Internet. You might only want a section but you can cut and come again.

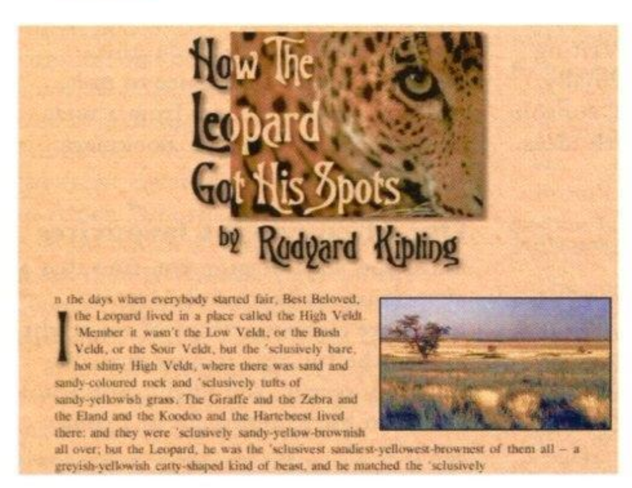
For plain text versions you should pop along along to the gopher list - Public Domain Electronic Children's Books (**gopher://lib.nmsu.edu:70/11/.subjects/Education/.childlit/.childbooks**). However, HTML format pages are also coming online featuring Louisa May Alcott of Little Women fame, Daisy Ashford's The Young visitors, JM Barrie's Peter Pan and the great Oz books from L Frank Baum as well as Frances Hodgson Burnett and Lewis Carroll plus Rudyard Kipling, Jack London's Call of the Wild and loads more.

These live in odd corners of the Internet and move from time to time. There's a collection of details and addresses at **www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/storclas.html** but you may need to send in the bloodhounds occasionally to track down sites as they move around.

Pam Turnbull
educ@acornuser.com



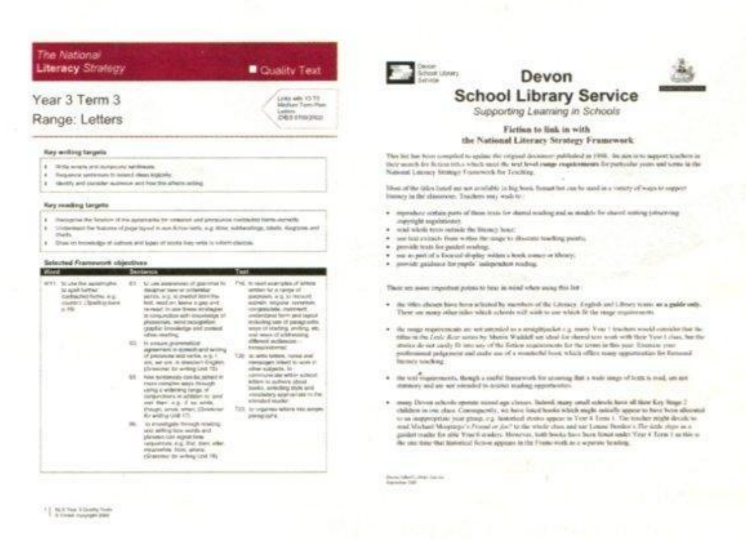




The Big Read

www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread

You can read what celebrities have nominated as their favourite book and why. Then make your own favourite count by voting. This makes an unusual basis for a discussion and persuasive speaking and listening as well as writing. There are downloadable resources connected with this created by The National Literacy Trust at **www.readon.org.uk**



Fab favourites

Ted Hughes

www.ted-hughes.net

Not really for children but a great place for teachers and more advanced students of Hughes, his stories, poems and life. There are essays, articles and reviews a great site for the Hughes scholar.

Brian Jacques

www.redwall.org

Welcome to Redwall. This is a site created by and for fans for fans. There are pictures and interviews as well as puzzles and fan news.

Diana Wynne Jones

http://suberic.net.dwj/

Not the prettiest of sites but there are interviews and news plus images. You can also track how her Chrestomanci world is transformed to the big screen next year in the guise of an animated film called Howl's Moving Castle. Another fan site but not particularly child-friendly.

Philip Pullman

www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/

A publisher's site which is very stylish and as well as details on the books, there is a letter from the author, a biography and his advice on how to write a book. A useful source of information for report and biography writing.

JK Rowling

http://falcon.jmu.edu/ ~ ramseyil/rowling.htm

There's a biography and autobiography here and an interview with JK Rowling including how she gets her ideas. An interesting touch is that there are clippings of articles written about the books, for and against. A good resource for other literacy lessons. There are also some interesting research and writing tasks for children too, find a castle in the UK is the first step!

JRR Tolkien

www.tolkiensociety.org

www.tolkien.co.uk

http://gollum.usask.ca/tolkien/

There are huge amount out there and these are just a taster - not to even touch the film! The Tolkien society is a registered charity and looks at the other works of Tolkien such as his translation of Beowolf. Tolkien.co.uk on the other hand is less academic with quizzes and competitions but is really a HarperCollins marketing tool. The last web address will take you to The Tolkien Timeline which does what is says a gives a brief synopsis of his life and works from 1892 to 1973 and provides details of books giving more detail.

There are too many to go into here, and for interesting reviews and interviews check out sites such as BBC's Newsround. They've recently interviews Eoin Colger of Artemis Fowl fame and the prolific Jacqueline Wilson.

Getting your java boost

Where can I get a RISC OS JVM from? I've been searching around the Internet and found no useful information about who's selling it these days. Which compiler do you recommend?

Lewis Westbury
by e-mail

No one is manufacturing and selling the Java compiler and Virtual Machine for RISC OS at present. Though you might be able to get it from companies such as CJE Micros (who always seem to have old things in stock) and other standard RISC OS dealers.

The telephone is likely to be a better option than the Internet because you can talk about what it is you want it for and options can be suggested.

However an alternative solution to your problem is provided by Peter Naulls at his **www.chocky.org** *site. Peter has written his own JVM for RISC OS, along with two compilers ported to RISC OS by him and a lot of utilities.*

Blast from the past

I know this may be a strange request, but in 1994, I had a program published in your magazine. This was when I was 14 so I'm looking for a issue of Acorn User it was in, so I was wondering if it is possible to get back issues from this time.

Thanks
Richard King

Due to space restrictions we no longer keep full archives of Acorn User so we can't help Richard on this one. Perhaps if you have a set that covers this period and can locate this program you can get in touch with us and we'll forward your information to him. Thanks.

Family scheduling

I've been in touch with the Really Good Software Company because I thought their NoticeBoard program would handle a problem that we have. Unfortunately it isn't quite the thing being a presentation program, however it was suggested that you might know how I could achieve my aim of creating an electronic noticeboard.

I am one of a crowd of children and grandchildren who go and visit my Mother from time to time. So that we do not all turn up at once, we have to liaise and it would be useful to view a continually updated calendar.

We all have e-mail including my Mother. So I was hoping that there might be some software that would be a kind of Web site that we could all read and edit.

Does this exist?
Gil Devlin
by e-mail

There are several solutions I could think of, including dedicated networking software that would cost you a few thousand pounds to implement. I suspect that's not quite what you need.

Resource management is an issue for businesses, usually this is arranged the other way around than the way you want it. In other words it's a matter of getting all the resources available at one time (people attending meetings are simply referred to as resources along with a projector, a room and so on). What you want is to be able to spread yourselves around and not all be in the same place at the same time.

As I said you could look for a very high tech solution but that costs money and the more rarified the option you want to achieve the more expensive it will be. So scratch that idea.

The next option to look at, since you mention Web site, would be a calendar-based idea allowing a fixed set of users to access a Web site and mark on the calendar when they are going to be at a the location in question. Others can come along, look at the calendar and schedule themselves accordingly.

In terms of Web programming this is not too difficult to achieve but again you are talking money. You would need to have a commercial Web site with PHP for the programming and SQL for a database. Not hugely expensive but you would also need to be able to do the programming and that would certainly cost, unless you could do it yourself.

However there are even cheaper options: You are all on e-mail so what you need is a way of contacting everybody to say "We're going to be there on Sunday afternoon, don't anyone else go." Or whatever.

On all e-mail software you can create what's called a "distribution list", this is a list of e-mail addresses and you use it to send one message to more than one person quickly. You could use this, everyone would have to set up their e-mail to have their own distribution list containing everybody else's e-mail address.

This is not the simplest option however, because each person needs to configure their software separately.

The final option is to have your own private, family, mailing list. You can create one very easily on Yahoo! (for example) and specify exactly who the list goes to. You can make it private so nobody else can join, you can make it invisible so no one else even knows it's there.

Then when you want to schedule a visit you e-mail the mailing list, the message then gets sent out to everyone else on the list who can respond publicly on the list or privately to you. And voila, your own message board system.